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A

TRIP TO HOLY-HEAD

IN A

MAIL COACH

WITH A

CHURCHMAN AND A DISSENTER,

IN THE YEAR MDCCXCIII.

EX COLLISIONE OPPOSITORUM CONUSCAT VERITAS.

LONDON:

**PRINTED FOR B. LAW AND SON, AVE-MARIA-LANE;
AND J. DEBRET, PICCADILLY.**

1793.

TRIP TO HOLY-HEAD

IX 4

MAIL COACH



CHURCHMAN AND A DISSENTER

IN THE YEAR MDCCLXIII

BY WILLIAM B. STODOLSKY, ESQ. VOLUME

LONDON

PRINTED FOR A. LAW AND SON, (LONDON)

AND J. BARNES, (LONDON)

1793

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reader is informed, that the familiar conversation which passed in the course of this journey, and which is related by one of the company, in this series of letters, to his friend; was upon the following topics—The Toleration Act, passed 1689—The Enlargement of that Act, 1779—The American War—The Question of a Reform—The late Applications for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test-Laws—The French Revolution.

April 2, 1793.

Sir Jos^{ph} Gordon B

ADVERTISEMENT

This reader is informed, that the first
of this journey, and which is intended for one
of the company, in this first effort, to
his friend; was upon the following topics—
—The Toleration Act, passed 1801—The
Establishment of the Act, passed 1801—The
mean War—The Question of a Motion—
The late Application for a Medal of the
Corporation and the Laws—The French
Revolution.

Wm. L. G. 1801

A TRIP TO HOLY-HEAD.

LETTER I.

Holy-head.

DEAR JACK,

WE got here last night well. How long we may be detained for a fair wind is uncertain. My time is employed in walking about, and some part of it in recollecting a curious conversation that passed among us in our way hither. It was, I acknowledge, of a kind quite new to me, and will, I fancy, be amusing to you. I shall give you but a part of it in this first Letter. You may perhaps hear further from me hereafter on the same subject.

Our company consisted of a Lady, two Gentlemen, and your humble Servant. We had not got far from town before one of

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the gentlemen broke silence, and with a great deal of good humour and vivacity said,—We are to spend two or three days together in this little room, and I make no doubt, from the good nature I see in each countenance, that we are all disposed to contribute our utmost to the tranquillity and cheerfulness of this long journey. Now I have made it my observation, accustomed as I am to travel in Mail-coaches, that 'tis generally a good while before the company, how well soever disposed, are perfectly free and happy. A dead silence usually prevails, till they have all framed a guess of each other's characters and professions in life. I should think, therefore, if we were instantly to throw out our ideas of one another, with that ease and freedom which I am sure may be expected from the pleasant appearance of every one here, we could scarce fail of being amused, and of falling upon some subject of discourse that would be instructive and entertaining to us all. I hope I sha'nt be misunderstood. I mean no other disclosure of our professions in life than may introduce us to habits of free inter-

intercourse, and to the discussion of subjects religious, political, or commercial, from which, however differently we may possibly think, light may be struck without any undue heat.

Sir, said a gentleman that sat in the opposite corner, I perfectly understand you, and, for my own part, have no objection to the proposal. But what do you mean by profession?—our religious, or civil profession? Oh! replied the other, both, or either, just as you please. Well! but which said the answerer, is to be guessed at first? Faith! replied the gentleman who proposed the scheme, I don't care which. The company, however, all agreed that we should begin with religion. Why then, said the gentleman in the corner, as you have made the proposal, I think you, my good Sir, should begin. With all my heart, replied he, and, if you please, begin with you, Sir, who I take to be a Dissenter.

You have rightly guessed, answered the other. But give me leave to ask, What was your reason for supposing me a Dis-

senter? Why, said he, there is a *Je ne sais quoi*, a certain something in your countenance, excuse me if I call it primness, which I have often noticed in those of your profession. And then, Sir, I observe your dress is plain and grave, from whence I conclude you are a clergyman of that order. And now having taken this freedom with you, you are at liberty, Sir, to take the same with me, and to tell the company what you take to be my religious profession.

Why, then, replied the Dissenter, I take you, Sir, to be a Churchman. Yes, Sir, said he, I am: and give me leave in return to ask, What are your reasons for this opinion? Why truly, said the Dissenter, beside the consideration, that the majority being of your profession the chance is greatly in favour of my guess; besides this, your free mode of speaking, not very usual among the prim Dissenters, (Faith! I don't care which) induces me to suppose that you are no Non-Conformist.

No, I am not, said our good-natured Churchman, and I wish, my good Sir, you were not. For, to tell you the truth,

I have

I have had, especially of late, great prejudices against that description of people. But I don't mean any reflection on you. For however mistaken, and on some accounts dangerous members of society, the generality of them may be, I do really augur otherwise of you. Your appearance, Sir, is grave; yet with that gravity I observe a mixture of frankness and good-nature.

But now we are got upon the subject, added the Churchman, will you oblige me, Sir, all censure apart, with some account of the principles of that body of people, for I may possibly be mistaken in my opinion of them, and I have no doubt there are some worthy men among them.

A Dissenter, he replied, in the proper acceptation of the term, is one who conforms not to the rites of the Church of England, whether he be a Papist, Quaker, Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptist. But, in the sense it is commonly used, it means those of the three last descriptions. And the Toleration Act, at the Revolution, had them chiefly in its eye, as had also that

further Act passed in their favour in the year 1779.

But pray, Sir, said the Churchman, now you speak of the Toleration Act, will you do me the favour of explaining it, for indeed I have but an imperfect idea of it?

You must know, Sir, answered the Dissenter, at the eve of the Revolution in 1688, both the Church and the State were in imminent danger. Popery, with all its tremendous consequences, was coming in upon us like a flood. The Bishops felt the danger, and sensible that the Dissenters had not been treated as they ought to have been, and that their concurrence was necessary to secure the Church from falling again into the hands of the man at Rome, they made friendly overtures to them, and assured them of their ardent wish, when this cloud should be dispersed, that they, the Dissenters, might be put on a footing that should be perfectly easy and happy to them. The Dissenters readily concurred in the scheme of the Revolution. King William, of glorious memory, came in. And one of the first things he wished to have settled, was,
the

the providing for their security and prosperity, sensible that they were his most hearty friends, as they were known to be the friends of the constitution and liberty. But the most that could then be done for them was, the passing what is called the *Toleration Act*, which you wish me to explain to you.

Now you must understand, that many oppressive and cruel laws were passed against the Dissenters during the Reign of Charles the Second. These, it was natural to expect would, at the Revolution, have been instantly repealed. But they were suffered to remain in the Statute Book ; and, instead of the repeal of them, the Toleration Act came in to the aid of the Dissenters, by exempting them from a liability to those Statutes, upon condition of their taking the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, making and subscribing the Declaration against Popery, and subscribing the doctrinal Articles of the Church. So that doing this, though they object to the constitution, discipline, and ceremonies of the Church of England, they are put into a

state of protection, and are permitted to worship God in such manner as they judge most agreeable to his word.

Well! Sir, observed the Churchman, from this account of the Toleration Act, I find that you don't dissent from the doctrine, but only from the rites and ceremonies of the Church, and therefore are in the main with the Church.

True, answered the Dissenter, that was the case at the time when this Act was passed. There were few then, if any among the Dissenters, who could not qualify under this Act. But the matter is now somewhat changed.

But before we go into that question, said the Churchman, give me leave to ask, what are the grounds of your dissent from the articles which respect rites and ceremonies? For it is, I perceive, your difference in opinion with us here, that is the principal cause of your separation from the Church.

To enter particularly, said the Dissenter, into the reasonings upon this subject, would be too long and tedious a business for this company. I will, however, at your wish,
Sir,

Sir, give you a general view of the matter in debate. We object to some of the ceremonies of the Church, as not only having no authority from scripture, but as being of pernicious tendency. We object to others, because, though in themselves innocent, yet they are made necessary. We object to many things in the Liturgy, and to the discipline and government of the Church, as not agreeing, in our opinion, with the rule laid down in the New Testament, and the practice of primitive times. But more than this, we have our objections to the fundamental principle on which the Hierarchy stands. Your Church, Sir, claims "a power" to which we think it not competent—"of decreeing rites or ceremonies," and affirms that "it hath authority in controversies of faith." It is, excuse me, a parliamentary Church. In short, being established by the law of the land, and endowed by the state, we are at a loss to conceive how it can agree with our Saviour's account of it, who tells us that "his kingdom, or Church, is not of this world." Nor can we reconcile its constitution

tution with the account you give of it in your own articles. For if the Church of Christ be as you say, "a congregation of faithful men," and so collected out of the world, how can every individual in a parish be a member of it, yea, even Jews and Infidels, for these are liable to excommunication, and therefore must, in your opinion, be of the Church?

Why, Sir, said the Churchman, according to your account of our Church, it must be Anti-Christian, and you can be no other than hostile to it.

But I beg you, Sir, replied the Dissenter, to have patience. If you will allow me to proceed a moment in what I have to say on this matter, you will find me to be a very harmless enemy to your Church, if indeed the term enemy, which I know not how to relish, is to be applied to me at all. In the first place then, you will believe me when I say, that there are many individuals among the Governors of the Church, the Clergy, and the Laity, whom I greatly esteem, and account most sincere and exemplary Christians. Many of the
forms

forms used in the Church I highly approve of, and no doubt multitudes in the communion of it will be finally saved. And though I do not understand the business of an alliance between Church and State, or that this idea has any foundation in the New Testament, yet I revere the civil constitution of my country, and will be obedient to its laws in every instance that does not affect my conscience, and the duty I owe God and my neighbour.

Yea, Sir, I admit that if the majority in any state are disposed to establish a particular form of religion, I ought not by any act of violence, to oppose them, or to behave myself with any the least appearance of rudeness or indecency towards them. "Thou shalt not revile the gods (the rulers) of thy people." And I will add, as most countries have adopted some form of religion, and it is the idea of by far the greater part of the people of this country, that a certain form should be established here, I know of none, upon the whole, more favourable to the civil interests of men than ours. I had much rather

ther that Episcopacy, managed with that moderation which has prevailed for near a century past, should be the establishment, than the forms of the Presbyterians, Independents, or Baptists. Indeed, on the principle I have laid down, which is common to the generality of the English Dissenters, neither of these can be established. And what better security can a people give to the state for their peaceable disposition, than the public avowal of principles, by which they preclude themselves from a possibility of being uppermost?

Indeed, Sir, said the Churchman, your reasoning strikes me as having force in it, and the mildness of your disposition not a little pleases me. I won't be hasty; but I was going to say, you have almost persuaded me to be a Dissenter.

Well! Sir, replied the Dissenter, I can only say, as St. Paul did to King Agrippa, "I would to God you were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except"—shall I say "these bonds?" No. The disabilities and restraints that I lie under, however unjust and unreasonable,
are

are not to be mentioned the same time with what the Apostle suffered, and what an infinite number of my pious ancestors endured.

But we'll pause here. We are just got to our Inn, where I hope we shall meet a good dinner, and that none of the company will have any objection to sit down at the same table with a Non-conformist. You will find, my good Sir, though you thought me somewhat prim, that I can be as cheerful as any of you, and though a Dissenter, that I shall put forward after dinner our good King's health with as much zeal as any of you Churchmen. They were all pleased; assured him they were happy in having fallen into his company, and that they had only one request to make, which was, that the same subject might be resum'd in the afternoon.

Thus you have, Jack, our morning's conversation, and by another post you may perhaps have our afternoon's.

I am

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

S I R,

HAVING dined, drank the King's health, paid our reckoning, and entered our carriage, the subject of the morning's conversation was resumed.

You gave us an account, Sir, said the Churchman, in the morning, of the [To-leration Act passed at the Revolution in 1689, and, if I mistake not, intimated that there was another Act passed in favour of the Dissenters in the year 1779. Will you be so good as oblige us with an account of this last, and of the history of it?

This last Act, replied the Dissenter, did not repeal the former, so that those ministers who chuse to qualify under it, are still at liberty so to do. But this provides, that all such ministers as make a declaration of their belief of the Holy Scriptures, instead of subscribing the Articles, shall, taking the oaths of allegiance, &c. be entitled to all

all the exemptions and advantages of the former Act.

So then, Sir, returned the Churchman, this is a provision for those who object to the doctrinal, as well as the other, Articles of the Church of England.

It is, said the Dissenter. And if you will allow me to state the fact to you respecting the Dissenting ministers, in the year 1772, the time when their first application to Parliament was made, you will understand the grounds and reasons of it.

The greater part of them (that is of the three denoninations taken together) approved of the Articles, and qualified as the law directs. But very many of them could not conscientiously subscribe. Some, because they did not believe them. They therefore lay open to the penal laws. Some approved of them in general, but had their objections to certain terms in them of doubtful meaning. They therefore were in the same predicament. Some, and not a few objected, that though they were true, yet being of human composition, they could not think it right to subscribe them :
they

they would subscribe to the Scriptures, but not to words framed by fallible men. They therefore were alike exposed to the penal laws. And again, others objected to making any confession of faith at the requisition of the civil magistrate.

Now Sir, no man of a liberal mind will say, that persons of either of these descriptions, if peaceable and loyal subjects, be they Calvinists, Arminians, Arians, or Socinians ; or be their reasoning on the question of subscription itself mistaken or otherwise, are deserving of the vengeance of the penal laws. ~

True, said the Churchman, but give me leave to ask, How can it be a matter of conscience with any man, who is free to subscribe to the belief of the Holy Scriptures, to withhold subscription to what he believes to be the sense of scripture ?

Why truly, Sir, answered the Dissenter, I must acknowledge with you that I do not see the force of such reasoning. It would be no question of conscience with me, whether I should, *on a proper occasion*, subscribe to a declaration drawn by others,
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provided it met the idea and sense of my own mind. Admitting, however, that there are persons who have such difficulty, ought they, though willing to say they believe the Scriptures, to be denied the protection of the laws? Surely not.

But the question which most merited attention was, How far a man is obliged to give an account of his faith to him who has no right to demand it, and who demands it at the peril of depriving him, if he refuse, of his natural and civil rights? Here, Sir, I am at no loss to say, he is not obliged, or, in other words, that he is guilty of no sin in refusing to subscribe. Yea, I will add, if it could be proved that his subscribing were a positive acknowledgment of the rectitude of such imposing power, I should think it were his duty to refuse, because the doing it would be affirming what he believed to be an untruth. But this in my opinion is not the case. Had Nero told St. Paul that provided he acknowledged himself a Christian, no one should do him any harm, but he should have full liberty to preach the Gospel where

he pleased, I can't believe St. Paul would have hesitated a moment upon the matter, whether he might conscientiously make a confession of his faith. No; he would have said, I am a Christian. The latter would have contracted no guilt by subscribing, though the former would have gone beyond his line in demanding subscription.

But, indeed, if it be the will of the majority in any country, that a particular mode of religion should be established, and it be their wish that the minority who dissent should be protected from the evils to which their dissent might expose them; an acknowledgment of their dissent (which is in other words a profession of their faith) becomes necessary in order to their claiming that protection which the laws grant them. If a Dissenting minister persecutes those who disturb him in the discharge of his duty, he must say that he is a Dissenting minister, in order to avail himself of the law made in his favour. If he will not, how can he be protected? Thus, Sir, you have a general view of the

the state of the Dissenters at this time, and of their various reasonings on these matters.

This being the case, said the Churchman, I should suppose the difficulty must have been considerable, to procure such unanimity among yourselves, as would be necessary to engage the attention of legislature.

It was, replied the Dissenter, but however, by prudent management, the difficulty was surmounted.

Some good men among the Calvinists, who lamented the growth of error, and suspected that this application to Parliament originated in an aversion to the doctrine contained in the thirty-nine Articles, felt great pain, and thought they had a loud call in providence to oppose this measure. "What are we, said they, to go to Parliament, and hold a language that implies indifference to our own religious principles? We are not weary of what we take to be the true Gospel, and in defence of which our pious forefathers ventured their lives. We want no relief. Besides, where is the wisdom of our officiously

coming forward, to remove out of the way of Socinians and Arians certain obstructions to the propagation of their dangerous errors, which others are to be accountable for, not we?" This sort of reasoning had a considerable effect with many persons of honest minds but of little discernment.

The principal people, however, among the Dissenting Calvinists, and by far the greater part of them, opposed this reasoning with no small effect. They nobly said, " We don't merely consider ourselves at liberty to join in this application to Parliament, but think the regard we owe to our religious principles obliges us to give it all the support we possibly can. God forbid it should ever be thought, that we had our doubts that truth is incompetent to its own support, or that what we understand to be the gospel, wants the aid of the wealth of this world to add splendor to it, or of the powers of this world to crush its opposers. As we wish to enter the field ourselves unmanacled, we wish also the adversary may. We will meet him, not with carnal, but spiritual weapons; with

with sound reasoning, and not contemptuous language; with the Word of God and the armour of righteousness, and not with fines and imprisonment. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," and truth must make its way to the heart by other means than human laws. It is an insult to Christ, to plant by way of defence about the impregnable fortress of his Church, the puny batteries of penal laws. Such an illegitimate mode of protecting and supporting his kingdom, is the most invidious method the enemy of mankind could contrive to weaken and destroy it. And were a man of the most erroneous principles in religion to publish his doctrine to the multitude from the iron bars of a prison, he would be more likely to get proselytes, than if he were allowed to harangue them in the open air, without any apprehension for the safety of his person or property." This reasoning prevailed, and by much the greater part, as I said, of the Calvinistic Dissenters, cordially joined in the application.

Those who could not subscribe at the requisition of the civil magistrate, whatever their doctrinal sentiments might be, were not to be persuaded to join in the application. But their number, compared with the rest, was inconsiderable. They said, " Pray for an entire repeal of the penal laws, and don't submit to the substitution of one test in the room of another." But those Gentlemen did not allow themselves sufficiently to reflect on the great improbability, if not impossibility, of gaining that point at that time, considering the aspect which those laws bear to the Roman Catholics as well as the Protestant Dissenters. Willing, however, that their brethren might be put into a state of legal security, which it was hard to say how they themselves possibly could, they did not oppose the application, although they joined not in it.

As to the remainder, who objected to human formulas, but were willing to subscribe to the belief of the Scriptures, their number was not small, and they were most hearty friends to the application.

Thus the great difficulty respecting the general concurrence of the Dissenters in this business was got over. And, among so numerous a body of people through the kingdom, it was not to be wondered at that here and there some should be dissatisfied.

I think, Sir, said the Churchman, I clearly understand the grounds and reasons of your application to Parliament, and how matters stood with you as a body at this time. But will you be so good as to give us the history of the application itself, the manner in which it was conducted, and by what means it succeeded?

Some ministers, replied the Dissenter, who had thoroughly considered the matter, conferred together upon it, and were of opinion, that this was the proper time for applying. But, previous to the calling the general body together, two or three of them who had the distribution of the Royal Bounty to poor Dissenting ministers, and their widows and children, and were in habits of intimacy with some of the leading people in power, thought it their

duty to state this business to them, and to assure them that by taking it up and forwarding it, they would be doing a thing manifestly right in itself, and which would greatly oblige the Dissenters. Lord North, struck with the rectitude of the measure, candidly signified his willingness to accede to it. And Dr. Drummond, then Arch-bishop of York, was, upon this the first mention of it, alike favourably disposed to it.

The ministers were allowed to inform their brethren of the good disposition of government; and they, persuaded that this communication would have a considerable influence to procure unanimity, immediately summoned the general body. The effect was such as they expected. For those, who it was natural to suppose would be cool, if not utterly averse to the business for the reasons before mentioned, were scarce likely to object, when they found there was such a manifest opening before them. A committee was appointed to treat with our friends above, which committee had quickly the pleasure of
 4 being

being fully satisfied, that the information they had received was well founded.

But, Sir, not two or three weeks passed before Lord North and the Archbishop had difficulties thrown in their way, which at first did not occur to their minds. They still clearly saw the rectitude of the abstract question respecting religious liberty, that no man ought to be persecuted for his religious opinions ; but they were shook upon the policy of the measure, whether it were consistent with the safety of the Church to enlarge the Toleration Act, and so to allow of a dissent from its doctrines, as well as its rites and ceremonies. “ This would be an innovation. If they said A, they must say B, and so on to the end of the alphabet. The petitioning clergy were eager to have the Articles revised, and the granting the Dissenters their request, would give encouragement to the others who were manifestly for throwing all into confusion. Besides, if every man upon declaring his belief of the Scriptures might be allowed to set up as a preacher, a wide door would be opened to enthusiasm and fanaticism.”

Such

Such were the main objections to the policy of the bill. Upon which I shall only observe here, that sound morality is, after all, the best policy. Is it, or is it not right to persecute men for their religious principles? Or, in other words, to forbid them to propagate what they take to be the sense of Scripture? for such liberty and no more was the object of the bill. The telling them, “ You are not in a state of persecution, the penal laws are not carried into execution, nor have you any reason to apprehend they will”—All this was to little purpose; for what man who knows himself to be a peaceable and good subject, can like to be in a state of connivance instead of legal security?

So the matter stood when the Bill was brought into the House of Commons—Lord North not having it in his power, as matters were circumstanced, to give it positive support, and yet, after what had passed, feeling himself no way disposed to oppose it. Many able speeches were delivered in favour of religious liberty, and after a very particular investigation of the subject,

subject, the bill passed the Commons by a great majority. Its fate was different in the House of Lords, where, however, it was not without a support, which did no small honour to the abilities and principles of many noble Peers.

The disappointment was felt by the Dissenters. They took care, however, to guard against intemperate warmth, which indeed would have ill become their character as ministers of religion, and which they were sensible would, if indulged, operate powerfully to obstruct the success of a future application. For they by no means gave up the point, satisfied their cause was founded in truth and policy.

Many pamphlets were published on the occasion, and light hereby diffused over a subject that had been little thought of. The Committee took great pains, by frequent visits to the Lords spiritual and temporal, and to the members of the lower House, to investigate thoroughly the merits of the question, and to obviate objections urged respecting the influence which the passing this bill might have upon the safety and tranquillity of the Church.

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They said they had no connection with the petitioning clergy; that they presumed not to dictate respecting any alterations in the constitution of the Church, its discipline or articles; that it ill became them to give an opinion on the terms of admission into it; and that whether the door were narrow or wide, all they had to ask was, that there might be sufficient room without, and that they might enjoy all that religious liberty, to which as good subjects they conceived they had a right, and which would not endanger the peace either of the Church or State.

These reasonings met with a patient and favourable attention, produced the desired effect, and in the year 1779 the bill passed both Houses, and received the Royal assent.

But I am afraid, said the Dissenter, that you are tired with this long tale. We will dismiss the subject, for we are just got to our Inn.)

Sir, said the Churchman, we are obliged to you for the information you have given us, and as you gave us the King's health

at

at noon, we will certainly drink yours at night, and that of all such moderate and candid Dissenters as yourself. But I shall wish much to know to-morrow, with the leave of the company, how you come now to be upon such ill terms with government, and with the people of this country in general.

Thus, my friend, I have given you our afternoon's conversation. And before long you may perhaps have what followed the next day.

I am

Yours, &c.

LET-

L E T T E R III.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU see I am as good as my word. Having at our setting off, the second day of our journey, had some talk about our entertainment the past night, the weather, country, roads, and our next stage, we naturally fell upon the subject of the present political state of the Dissenters; a topic which all the company seemed more deeply interested in, than what had hitherto engaged our conversation.

Having gained your point, said the Churchman, in the year 1779, and feeling yourselves now in a state of legal security, I should suppose you must have been content and happy. We were, said the Dissenter. Pray how is it then, replied the Churchman, that you are now considered in so unfavourable a point of light, both by government and the people
in

in general? For you cannot be insensible of the fact, that you are understood to be hostile to the measures of administration, and, forgive me if I add, the disturbers of the public peace.

This question, replied the Dissenter, will require very particular discussion; nor am I unwilling to enter into it. But, in the mean time, you will give me leave to state to you a few plain facts of material consequence in this debate. Which done, you shall be at full liberty, Sir, to bring forward your objections to our political character and conduct. And as you will not wonder that I should vindicate the Dissenters to the utmost of my power from the aspersions cast on them, so you may be sure I will not justify them in what I take to be amiss.

In the first place then, he proceeded, it is a fact that the Dissenters are, and ever must be, if they act consistently with their principles and interest, Whigs. They are hearty friends of the constitution, that is, of limited monarchy, or that form of government by King, Lords, and Commons

mons which has long obtained in this country. How it may be now with a few young people among them, of little property, less knowledge, and still less modesty, I wo'nt pretend to say. But I am sure, a very little time ago, a republican among the Dissenters, would have been stared at as a wonderful phenomenon. To the principles also of the Revolution in 1688, the Dissenters are well known to be warmly attached, for that is the glorious era whence they date their liberties. By that event they consider the constitution as confirmed, and proved to possess those principles which are essential to its perpetuity and improvement. None rejoiced more than they did upon that occasion; and King William, our glorious Deliverer, ever looked upon them as his natural and most cordial friends.

The settling the succession in the present family, was a measure that afforded them the highest pleasure. And as at the close of Queen Ann's reign they trembled when the Schism Bill, that cruel engine of Tory production, was just taking effect,

so

fo their joy was unbounded at the coming
 in of good King George. Their attach-
 ment to his family is too well known to
 need proof. The late Duke of Newcastle,
 whose zeal for the Brunfwick line none
 ever doubted, and to whom his present
 Majefty, in a conversation with him at the
 clofe of his life, acknowledged himfelf
 and his family more indebted than to any
 man for his exertions in the year 1715; I
 fay, that good old Whig was their firm
 friend. They diftinguifhed themfelves by
 their loyalty in the two rebellions of 1715
 and 1745; and there are thofe among them
 now living, who, at their own expence,
 and at the hazard of their lives, bore
 arms in defence of the crown. They may
 then expect to be believed when they fay,
 as they have done on many occafions,
 and lately in the moft explicit and public
 manner, that they are the firm friends of
 the Hanover fucceffion as by law efta-
 blifhed. You are fatisfied therefore, Sir,
 they are Whigs, nor is it eafy to conceive
 how they fhould be otherwife fo long as
 they are Diffenters, and hold their religious
 D liberties

liberties on the grounds of an Act of Toleration.

There is another fact I wish to establish, before we proceed to inquire how far they are culpable in the eye of government and the public—and that is, that the Dissenters, take them as a body, have not been accustomed to meddle with politics. The generality of them through the kingdom are plain pious people, whose minds are more occupied with the concerns of another world than this. So they may but provide for their families, be on good terms with their neighbours, and have no alarming apprehensions of being deprived of their religious liberties, they don't trouble their heads about what is doing above, who is in or who is out. When indeed public calamities are impending, they inquire after news, and have an opinion to give on the measures of government as well as others.

And though I am far from thinking any one is to be precluded from the right of judging for himself in questions of a political nature, and am persuaded that it
would

would be a great folly to attempt to obstruct the diffusion of this kind of knowledge at a time when almost every man throughout Europe considers the trading in this commodity as his birth-right, yet the good old Puritans, whose descendants the Dissenters are, were used to think serious religion on the decline, when good people, without any call of Providence, went with eagerness into speculations of this kind; and I am well satisfied, that in those congregations of the Dissenters through England and Wales, where genuine piety most flourishes, there is the least talk about politics. In cities and large trading towns, Dissenters of opulence, and in a genteel line of life, are indeed under a temptation to mingle more with the world than their country brethren; and how much they have suffered by it in their most important interests 'tis not to my present purpose to say. Only I must insist, for that is the present point to be established, that the generality of the Dissenters are not of this description.

And as to their ministers, Sir, they have more important matters to attend to than questions of policy and jurisprudence, which fall to the department of the Court and the Senate. Nor do I think, were you to inquire through the kingdom, you would find many of them ambitious to be accounted statesmen. If here and there such a one is to be met with, you will find little of that Puritanical favour in his public religious exercises, which much prevailed among the Dissenters fifty or sixty years ago, and which I hope is not even yet wholly departed.

You will tell me, indeed, of a Dr. Price and a Dr. Priestley, men who have been much talked of, and who, in my opinion, have done a great deal of good and a great deal of harm. I do all honour to their characters as scientific men, and men of distinguished integrity and virtue. By their calculations and experiments the world has been greatly benefited, and their reasonings on civil and religious liberty have met the approbation of not a few wise and good men of all parties. But, Sir, considered

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as Dissenting Ministers, they evidently went beyond their line. And, popular as they may have been among political and philosophical christians, I assure you they are far from being popular among the general run of the Dissenters. You greatly mistake the matter, if you suppose them to be the representatives of the general body of the Dissenters, or trustees for either their politics or divinity.

And now, Sir, these two points settled, that the Dissenters are staunch Whigs, and that taking them as a body they are not noisy politicians, but a serious peaceable people, what you may have to lay to their charge cannot materially affect them.

Why, Sir, said the Churchman, you are generally considered as having had a principal concern in bringing on the American war. You were thought to be, of all people, the most eager in crying out for a reform both in Church and State, in representation and executive government. The untimely, rude, and clamorous manner in which you brought forward your petition for the repeal of the Cor-

poration and Test Acts, shewed you to be hostile to administration. And the extatic pleasure you expressed at the French Revolution, and at every stage of its progress, marks your character as veering to republicanism, and as a people therefore who ought to be very carefully watched and guarded against.

The Dissenter replied, as to the American war, which issued in a separation of the colonies from the mother country, and brought after it a prodigious debt, which is still an occasion of complaint and uneasiness among us, it was an event greatly to be lamented. But if the cause of it be inquired into, it will be found to have originated in a concurrence of circumstances, few of which can with justice be imputed to the Dissenters. The truth is, the dismissal at the beginning of the present reign of a Whig ministry, whose zeal for the Royal Family had been long tried and approved, was an occasion of general uneasiness. A change of principles, it was said, had taken place, and that idea was industriously, and perhaps malevo-

malevolently circulated. It fled to the Colonies, and the people there were taught to look with a jealous eye upon the measures of government.

And now, that cordiality and confidence which had long prevailed between them and us, began to decline. Nor were there men wanting who, themselves deceived by false reports, or insidiously meaning to impose on others, were in a temper to blow the sparks of dissatisfaction and suspicion into a flame. There was as yet no rupture, nor perhaps did a man among them dream of a separation. The governors, however, particularly of the northern provinces, sent home alarming accounts of the disposition of the people to revolt. The Americans, informed from hence of the ill offices their governors had rendered them, were irritated to the last degree. So that every measure adopted both to quiet and restrain them, was considered as meant either to lull them asleep, or to ensnare them.

They were, however, still on both sides reluctant to a separation, insomuch that

neither party could persuade itself, that the opposite meant to push things to extremities. This is well known to have been a fact as to the Americans. And I shall not easily forget what a great man said to me but a little before the war broke out:—"Sir, you may depend upon it there will be no blood spilt in America." The event, however, proved otherwise. After many struggles, the genuine effect of filial affection, full credit was at length unhappily given to the report, that chains were forging for them by a Tory and despotic ministry. So they began to form, unite, and prepare for resistance. And what followed you need not be told.

Now, Sir, in many of these causes of the American war, the Dissenters could have no influence. But you will say, the northern colonists, because descendants of ancestors driven from this country by the furious zeal of Arch-bishop Laud, must to be sure be Dissenters; and therefore no doubt had communication with their brethren here, who urged them on to this business. But this, Sir, ought to be well proved

proved before it is asserted. There are documents now existing, and I will add in my own hands, which go directly to prove in the most unequivocal manner, that the leading people in the Massachuset government, did not, at the eve of the war, aim at a separation, much less at independence; and that they most heartily wished to be on good terms with us, and to be considered what they insisted they were, loyal subjects. And you need not be told that the Virginian and southern Colonies, which were by no means of the Dissenting cast, were as violent in their opposition to this country as those we have been speaking of.

If there were any among the Dissenters here, who, in the early stage of this unhappy quarrel, carried their speculations to such a length as to persuade themselves that it was seriously the intention of government to subjugate the Americans, and that it was therefore their duty to warn them of their danger, I think they speculated untruly, and are therefore to be blamed. It was by no means the interest
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of government to carry matters to the length which these people supposed. For whatever might be the principles of those in power, they must have been very shallow politicians indeed, if they could conceive it possible, considering the temper of the times, that they should succeed in an attempt to enslave the Colonies, with a view to rivet the chains upon us at home. Such an Utopian scheme could scarce enter into the heads of any men. And I know it to be a fact, that the Bishops, how much soever they wished episcopacy to be admitted into America, (and under due restraints I see no reason why it might not) were exceeding moderate in the measures they took to that end, and cautioned their friends in that country to be careful that they did not irritate their Dissenting brethren, or give them the least occasion to apprehend that they meant to infringe upon their religious liberties.

A few visionary people, who had filled their heads with horrible ideas of the despotic intentions of government, might

go into that country, and officiously cense the people wherever they came with their political opium, and so do, I won't say intentionally but really, a great deal of harm. Such men, if they are to be brought to their senses, must feel themselves unhappy. But the blame of this is not to be laid to the body of Dissenters. Among all bodies of people there will be some wrong-headed folks, who at every change of the moon, every new appearance in the world and the church, run stark mad with politics and divinity.

But the war, as I said, took effect through the unhappy concurrence of a vast variety of causes, and some of them, to appearance, of very opposite natures. Not this and that person only, or this and that description of men only, are to be blamed. Both the Colonies and the Mother country are to be blamed: they for being too credulous of every idle report brought to them, and we for being too hasty in our measures with them. The American governors were to blame. Administration was to blame. Parliament was to blame.

blame. The people of this country in general were to blame.

Well but, Sir, said the Churchman, Dr. Price took a part in this business, which always struck me as having a tendency to inflame. His book to prove the injustice and impolicy of the war, was written with no small acrimony; and his zeal, supported as it was with a phalanx of disaffected people, must have had an effect to push things to extremities.

But, Sir, replied the Dissenter, supposing him and his connections to be ever so blame-worthy, why are the Dissenters to be reproached? He did not write by their direction or authority, nor was his book, when written, taken up and recommended by any body of people among them. And it should be remembered, though I am not fond of recrimination, that some who have since that time poured the most severe reflections on Dr. Price, as a friend of anarchy and the most licentious principles, were themselves full as violent as ever he could possibly be in their opposition to the American war. And if the
Dissenters

Dissenters must at all events be charged with having contributed to the failure of this unfortunate war, by their unreasonable and warm opposition to it, they have at least the consolation to reflect, that the Father of the present minister, Mr. Burke, and many other friends of their King and Country, were sharers with them in the blame. But, Sir, the complexion of the Dissenters is not to be taken from the political writings of Dr. Price, any more than from those of Mr. Israel Mauduit, who wrote as pointedly on the other side of the question; and with whom not a few of them were in unison as to political matters.

But give me leave to observe, before we quit this subject, that the vast variety of circumstances which contributed to the loss of the Colonies, operated, as is the case in all events, especially those of such magnitude, under the direction and controul of Divine Providence; and this calamity, taken in the whole round of it, was meant, no doubt, to chastise both their and our national ingratitude, and other crying vices. It will be well if we learn from
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it the importance of moderation in our reasoning about public matters, and of guarding against that undue warmth which has often thrown the happiest and most prosperous people into confusion. This advice is the more reasonable, as in the short account given of the origination of the American war, we have seen circumstances of trifling account in the beginning, prove in the end to have been big with consequences the most calamitous.

Nor can we reflect on the part which the French Cabinet took in this business, and consider the miserable state to which it is now reduced, without being struck with the vicissitude of human affairs, and feeling ourselves obliged to acknowledge, *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.* It requires a more than ordinary stretch of charity to believe, that their interference in favour of the Americans was the pure effect of disinterested concern for the rights of mankind. The world set it down to the account of animosity to this country. And if the question were thoroughly inquired into, it would perhaps
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be found, that it was a measure adopted through the counsels of those, who hoped it would in its consequences operate to bring about a change of a like nature in France.

Be that as it may, the two characters which then drew the attention of the public, as the generous assertors of the injured cause of liberty, are now cast into a horrible shade. The French General, who had commanded the forces of the revolting Americans, we see, through the desertion of his com-patriots at home, precipitated into a prison; and the unhappy Monarch, whose statue amidst the shouts of the new American Republic, had taken place of that of the British King, perishing by the hands of his own subjects on a scaffold. These are a kind of phœnomena in the history of human kind, which, to overlook, would argue the greatest folly; and in which not to observe the hand of divine Providence, would require the levity, irreligion, and infidelity of the unhappy French.

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But it is time to pause, and to dismiss for the present a subject that will cast a gloom upon our minds, and spoil our relish for our dinner. For we are just got to — where our coachman tells us he can allow us an hour and no more.

Thus, Jack, you have our second morning's conversation. The subject was resumed in the afternoon; and if you like politics, you may perhaps, before 'tis long, hear again from

Yours, &c.

L E T.

L E T T E R IV.

DEAR SIR,

IN the afternoon, as was intimated in my last, our subject was resumed.

Well, Sir, said the Dissenter, I hope your prejudices against us on account of the American war are removed, and that you don't lay the blame of that business at our door. I do not, said the Churchman. But there are other charges lying against you, which I fancy you will not find it so easy to get rid of. Who have been more busy than you Dissenters, to put forward this noisy talk of a Reform, and so to throw a peaceable and happy people into confusion?

Sir, said the Dissenter, there is no government on earth but has its imperfections and mistakes, and of consequence there is no government but needs a reform. You don't do well, therefore, to scout the very word as if it were a bad one, and to

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tremble at the idea of it as if you saw a spectre. There was never any period in the history of this country when a reform was not wanting, and he must know very little of the world indeed, who is not sensible that it is now really wanted; as well as loudly called for. But give me leave, Sir, before we agitate this question, which I hope we shall do with moderation and good humour, to disabuse the Dissenters, as far as I am able, of the imputation of wantonly joining in the cry, with a malevolent view of throwing all into confusion.

Dissenters have a right to reason upon the state of their country as well as others; and if they don't feel for its welfare, they are certainly not good members of society. But the greater part of them, as I observed before, are chiefly busied about matters of far greater importance than politics. If, however, feeling in common with their fellow-subjects that weight of public taxes, which hath accumulated through various, and many of them I acknowledge unavoidable causes; if hearing abroad much talk upon the business of a reform; and if alarmed, as all the
world

world have been of late, with convulsions of a very extraordinary kind through Europe ; if, I say, thus circumstanced, they express their wish that some lenient and effectual measures may be adopted to redress grievances, and quiet the minds of the public, they surely do not merit the character of disturbers of the peace of society : especially if they are careful to avoid those intemperate heats, and those indecencies of language as well as conduct, which tend not only to defeat the object, but in the long run to weaken and destroy a constitution, the best framed of any on earth to secure the rights and liberties of mankind.

But, Sir, said the Churchman, it is notorious that many Dissenters have fallen into those indiscretions (I might call them by a harsher name) which you protest against. Whether they have or not, replied the Dissenter, we will by and by enquire. In the mean time allow me to throw out a few general ideas upon the matter of a reform, as it respects parliament, the executive part of government, and the church.

As to a parliamentary reform, it is a question of great magnitude, and I pretend not to be competent to it. Its utility and importance have been announced by many in power, and it hath been much wished for abroad. Something therefore should be done. And common sense teaches that whatever scheme is adopted, it ought to be a practicable one. But I have never yet met with any scheme that appeared to me to be of this description. Those which go to the greatest extent, such as Major Cartwright's and the Duke of Richmond's, cannot in my opinion be attempted, especially as things are now circumstanced, without endangering the existence of the constitution. And would a skilful physician advise a remedy which he was morally sure would destroy the patient? But, say the agents of France, that is the very thing that should be attempted. "Pull down your constitution. It may be easily done, and if you want assistance we will come and help you." But what sober man, what friend to his country, even though his principles were republican, can reconcile himself

self to the horrors of a civil war, and wish to see our rivers dyed with blood? Or who that is concerned for his own safety, would lend his hand to the pulling down a building, under the ruins of which he had every reason in the world to apprehend he should be buried. But the constitution, Sir, is in my apprehension a beautiful and venerable structure. It is its repair that is to be wished for, not its destruction. Even in its present state it is infinitely preferable to an imperious and tyrannical democracy.

Whatever measures, therefore, may tend to restore to it its natural and proper vigour; to possess each of the three states of its due proportion of power, and to prevent their unnatural coalescence and absorption in each other; to guard every avenue to parliament against the approach of bribery and corruption, and the dignity of those who sit there from the disgraceful taint of venal influence; and, in fine, to secure to itself the reverence, confidence, and hearty good will of the public; whatever measures may be thought of that embrace these objects, although they may be gradual in their operation,

ration, every sincere friend to this country would be glad to see adopted. I have not the presumption to propose any, but really I think we should not too hastily suppose, that there is not wisdom enough in the senate to devise some such measures, or virtue enough to carry them into effect. Mr. Grenville's act for trying the merits of contested elections, has produced very salutary consequences, and why may we not hope, that other remedies may before long be applied to the remaining evils complained of?

As to the executive part of government, there is certainly occasion for reform in the mode of administering justice, and of levying and applying the revenue. But be the evils in either of these departments what they may, they are not of such a kind or magnitude as to justify the circulating complaints through the kingdom, that not only tend to disquiet the minds, but irritate the passions of the public, and so to provoke insurrection and rebellion.

With regard to the former, admitting that great inconveniencies do arise from the obscurity in which the common law is enveloped,

veloped, and the difficulty of acquiring a comprehensive view of the statute-books which are grown to so immense a bulk; admitting that the progress of justice is much slower in this country than in some others, which by the way goes to prove that our constitution is at a remoter distance than theirs from despotism; admitting that the forms observed in our courts are intricate, expensive, and tedious, and that the chicanery of many practisers in the profession is become a very great grievance; admitting, I say, that all these complaints, and others that might be added, are not without foundation: yet surely we have considerations to oppose to these evils, which do infinitely more than balance them.

The mild spirit of our laws, which allows the accused all the assistance he can reasonably desire, and at the same time casts around the innocent an impenetrable shield; the security afforded to our persons, property, and reputation by the Habeas-Corpus Act, the law for trial by juries, and that respecting libels, which has lately received such a parliamentary exposition as

is manifestly favourable to the liberty of the press; the well known character of the judges, and the appointment of their salaries by legislature, whereby they are made independant of the crown: the advantages derived from these sources, too numerous to be particularly detailed, clearly show that we have comparatively speaking little to complain of on this head, but on the contrary much to boast of.

The king cannot send the meanest of his subjects to the Bastile by a Letter de Cachet, nor a peer oppress the most helpless peasant, without his having redress in our courts of justice. So that what one of the learned judges observed the other day, in a charge to the grand jury of Middlesex, is most certainly true, and deserving the attention of the public—that “ there is no nation in the
 “ world that can boast of a more perfect
 “ system of government than that under
 “ which we have the happiness to live,
 “ where no man is so high as to be above
 “ the reach of the law, and no man so low
 “ as not to be within its protection; where
 “ the power of the crown (on the one
 “ hand)

“ hand) and the liberty of the subject (on
 “ the other) are both effectually secured,
 “ and at the same time kept within their
 “ proper limits.”

But the question respecting the revenue is generally thought the most interesting, and a matter that calls loudly for reform: and no doubt the debt lying on this nation is very large, and the expences of government great, and of consequence the taxes burdensome. But then it should be remembered, that about one half of these taxes go to the payment of the interest of this great debt, which hath been long accumulating; and which was prodigiously increased by the American war; from the blame of which, as we have seen, no party among us is to be wholly excused. It should also be remembered, that a great part of the expences of government are on all hands acknowledged to be necessary*, and that

* The Bishop of Landaff, in an Appendix to his Sermon preached in Charlotte-street chapel, April, 1785; says, “—it
 “ has been studiously inculcated into the minds of the multitude, that a monarchy, even a limited one, is a far
 “ more expensive mode of civil government than a republic;
 “ that

that as a reform respecting the management
of the rest is certainly most desirable and
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“ that a civil list of a million a year, is an enormous sum
“ which might be saved to the nation. Supposing that every
“ shilling of this sum could be saved, and that every shilling
“ of it was expended in supporting the dignity of the crown
“ —both which suppositions are entirely false—still should I
“ think the liberty, the prosperity, the tranquillity, the
“ happiness of this great nation cheaply purchased by such a
“ sum; still should I think that he would be a madman in
“ politics, who would, by a change in the constitution, risk
“ these blessings (and France supplies us with a proof that
“ infinite risk would be run) for a paltry saving of expence.
“ I am not, nor have ever been, the patron of corruption.
“ So far as the civil list has a tendency to corrupt the judg-
“ ment of any member of either house of parliament, it has
“ had a bad tendency which I wish it had not; but I cannot
“ wish to see the splendour of the crown reduced to nothing,
“ lest its proper weight in the scale of the constitution should
“ be thereby destroyed. A great portion of this million is
“ expended in paying the salaries of the judges, the inter-
“ preters of our law, the guardians of our lives and pro-
“ perties!—Another portion is expended in maintaining am-
“ bassadors at different courts, to protect the general con-
“ cerns of the nation from foreign aggression; another
“ portion is expended in pensions and donations to men of
“ letters and ingenuity; to men who, have by naval, mili-
“ tary, or civil services, just claims to the attention of their
“ country; to persons of respectable families and connexions,
“ who have been humbled and broken down by misfortunes.
“ I do not speak with accuracy, nor on such a subject is
“ accuracy requisite; but I am not far wide of truth in say-
“ ing,

important, so this object has not been wholly kept out of view. In this business men of ability have exerted themselves, and not without some success: and among them Mr. Burke by his labours has certainly merited a large share of the thanks of the public. It should further be remembered, that in the arrangement of the taxes attention is paid to the important question of equality, and that a very considerable weight falls upon the opulent from which the lower orders of people are wholly exempted.

It is also to be considered, that the trade and commerce of this kingdom have of late years rapidly increased, and of consequence new sources of employment for the poor have been opened, and the price of labour raised. The legal annual provision for the poor is, if I mistake not, nearly of the same amount with the land tax. And the charitable institutions of every kind which have risen into

“ ing, that a fifth part of the million is more than sufficient
 “ to defray the expences of the royal household—What a
 “ mighty matter is it to complain of, that each individual
 “ contributes less than sixpence a year towards the support
 “ of the monarchy ?”

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existence all through this country, within twenty or thirty years past, are too numerous to be recited, and fail not to excite the admiration of every foreigner that visits us.

And yet after all that has been said, I don't mean to insinuate that there are few if any evils to be reformed. Far from it. Men of avarice and dissipation are of fruitful invention, and too many of these among us, void of all sense of justice, and all feeling for their country, are ever upon the watch to enrich themselves at the expence of the public. Strict economy, therefore, and unrelaxing attention are necessary, to guard the revenue against the rapacious assaults of men of no principle and of broken fortunes.

But be the evils that call for redress what they may, no man who compares the state of this country with that of any other kingdom or state in Europe, will I think be at a loss one moment to determine, on what spot he may be most likely to enjoy security, liberty, and happiness in their greatest perfection. As to France and the Netherlands, it is not fair to bring them, in the pre-

present crisis, into comparative view. But if any one, clearly convicted of seditious practices in this country, were to be punished according to his demerit, I don't know a more adequate punishment he could receive than that of being banished to one of those states.

Reformation in the Church is what now remains to be considered. But I must beg leave, Sir, to be silent here. I am a Dissenter, and it strikes me that it is scarce liberal for one who is not of the Church to take upon him to say what ought to be reformed in it. Indeed when called upon to justify my dissent from the Church of England, I am under the necessity of pointing out what I take to be amiss. But this I wish always to do with candour and moderation; and when debating the matter about the body of Moses, like Michael the archangel, I dare not bring against the adversary, be he who he may, a railing accusation.

Well but, said the Churchman, however candidly you have treated the question of reform in these three general branches of
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it, many of your brethren, I assure you, have treated it after a very different manner, or I am greatly misinformed.

I told you before, replied the Dissenter, that having given my own opinion upon the matter itself, and upon the manner in which all questions of this nature ought to be treated, you should be at full liberty, Sir, to point out what has been reprehensible in the conduct of any of my brethren. But I beg you will keep it in mind that the inadvertencies, or if you will indecent warmth, of some among us, is not to be set down to the account of the body of Dissenters.

Why then, Sir, returned the Churchman, we have heard much of your revolution sermons, and revolution dinners too, the former filled with politics, and the latter followed with toasts and speeches, which, as the story has gone abroad, were manifestly calculated to excite disaffection to government, if not to engender principles favourable to republicanism.

You have heard, rejoined the Dissenter, some truth and a great deal of falsehood. I
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will endeavour to separate the one from the other in the best manner I can, and I have my information from sources that may be depended on.

The Dissenters have been used for a long course of years to pay a particular attention to two memorable days in our calendar, the fifth of November, when by an extraordinary Providence the flower of the nation escaped instant destruction by the hands of popish miscreants; and the fourth of November rendered as famous by the landing of the glorious King William, whom the same Providence sent hither to deliver us from the chains of despotism, that had been already forged, and were then just ready to be rivetted on us.

The observation of these days, particularly by the Dissenters, and down to the present time, no one can wonder at who is acquainted with the history of this country, and is a friend of civil and religious liberty. Sir, the principles of the Church of Rome are still the same, however the tempers of many in her communion are meliorated by time and experience. Nor have the
Jesuits,

Jesuits, those able and faithful supporters of antichristian craft and tyranny, abandoned their ethical system, though their institution is now under a cloud. Their dispersion has perhaps contributed to the propagation of their morals. And however many of them of late, to the surprise of all the world, have become advocates for liberty, it ought not to be forgotten that by their diabolical casuistry they have shaken kingdoms to the centre, and bathed millions of innocent and pious people in seas of blood. I speak with no acrimony against individuals, but at a time when the tendency of men's political principles is watched with so jealous an eye, surely those political principles which, blended with religion, go to the establishing the most horrid despotism over men's consciences, properties, and persons, ought not to be wholly overlooked. No apology, therefore, need be made for the observation of the *fifth* of November.

The *fourth*, for the very same reason, ought to be observed. For the day the Prince of Orange set his foot on the British shore, a constitution the fairest and most

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venerable in the whole world, but then nearly on the point of expiring, recovered from the swoon into which the emissaries of Rome had cast her, assumed a smiling countenance, and asserted a claim she ought to have, and ever will have, not only to secure her own existence from immediate assassination, but to improve and prolong her life. This doctrine may not be pleasant in the ears of some people, but it stands upon the sound principles of reason and equity, and was that by which alone the revolution of which we are speaking in the year 1688, could have been effected. The Dissenters, though not benefited by the Prince of Orange's accession to the throne, in the manner and to the degree they had a right to expect, yet to this day think of him and the service he did this country, at the hazard of every thing that was dear to him, with rapture, and feel the most pleasing and grateful emotion at the sound of "the immortal memory of good King William."

Now thus circumstanced, can you wonder, Sir, that they should meet for public worship on the fourth and fifth of Novem-

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ber, persuaded as they are that the hand of God was concerned in those events? None surely can with reason blame them for offering their unfeigned tribute of praise for these signal interpositions of Providence in favour of their country. And yet even these meetings do not take place by the appointment of the Dissenters as a body, nor are they universally observed in our congregations. But, Sir, allow me to ask, Is it fair to give the name of politics to a recital of the facts to be commemorated and acknowledged on these occasions? No man is a greater enemy to the bringing politics into the pulpit than myself, and I speak the sense of the Dissenters in general. It is a great evil, and reflects no small dishonour on the character of a Christian minister, whose mind when leading the worship of God, ought to be occupied with subjects of an infinitely more noble and sublime nature. But it is an evil which, you will excuse me if I say, hath prevailed less in our Church than in yours.

It must be acknowledged indeed that Dr. Price, and some other ministers, did a few
years

years ago introduce into their sermons on the fourth of November extraneous matter. Many Dissenters greatly regretted it, and I believe they themselves have since been sensible of the mistake, as ill-disposed persons took occasion from thence to insinuate that they meant, the revolution in France commencing at that time, to put forward something of the like nature here. But however earnestly these gentlemen wished for a reform in this country, I am well satisfied that a change in the constitution of it was an idea at the remotest distance from their minds. Nor yet do I mean wholly to excuse them. They were to blame. The minds of many of their brethren were hurt, and a cry was instantly raised against us as abusing the liberty we enjoyed of worshipping God in our meeting-houses to the purposes of political discussion. But whatever their fault might be in thus going beyond their line, 'tis illiberal to the last degree to set it down to the account of the general body of Dissenters.

But it is your revolution dinners, said the Churchman, that I have chiefly in view.

These, if I am not greatly misinformed, have been conducted in a very indecent and riotous manner—multitudes of people of every description collected together—little ceremony observed in their manner of partaking of the festivity—a long train of toasts after dinner—speeches, motions, songs, clappings, and parading with colours through the hall—mounting the tables, knocking down glasses, and the like. And this I understand is called the revolution society, where the cause of freedom is asserted, the rights of man defended, the measures of government canvassed, the tyranny of kings and aristocrats reprobated, and the glorious French revolution cried up to the skies. Yea more, from this said revolution society, I am told, have issued messages and letters of congratulation to many Jacobin societies abroad, and to the National Convention itself.

Why really, Sir, replied the Dissenter, one would suppose from your account of this society, that it was instituted by the Dissenters, upon some previously digested plan, for the purpose of discussing political ques-

questions, opposing the measures of government, and fomenting a spirit of disaffection and sedition. But I can assure you this is not the fact. The truth is, a circle of friends, chiefly Dissenters, have been used for many years past to dine together on the fourth of November, for the sole purpose of commemorating the glorious revolution in the year 1688. The company, as I understand, was rarely numerous, the entertainment plain, and the whole conducted with decency and cheerfulness. But even in this state of the business there were many serious Dissenters, who had their objections to this meeting upon the general ground of its tendency to promote levity and dissipation.

Within however eight or ten years past it hath greatly changed its complexion. From a select it hath become a mixed company. People of high rank have sanctioned it with their presence. Many speeches have been made, the occasion of the festival furnishing copious matter for men of talents to dilate upon. The principles of the revolution have been investigated, and the king's

health having been drank, the immortal memory of King William toasted, the peers and other distinguished characters present complimented, and a song or two sung, the company have broke up.

These meetings thus increasing from year to year, and consisting of people of different descriptions and views, and who were too many of them disposed to be noisy and clamorous, as is the case in most public companies; these meetings, I say, thus deranged could no longer be called meetings of Dissenters, nor with propriety the Revolution Society. So the irregularities took place of which you speak, and which no doubt were greatly exaggerated by report. Many that were used to attend them, not a little disgusted, withdrew. And I hear at their last meeting, there were few respectable characters among them.

Thus you have, Sir, the best account I can give you of these revolution dinners, their origin, and the manner in which they have been conducted. And I leave you to judge, whether it would not be very illiberal to charge the Dissenters as a body with irregularities,

gularities, which it was by no means in their power to correct or controul. I will only add, that the more serious part of them have beheld these things with no small concern and regret.

To-morrow, Sir, said the Churchman, we shall I hope hear what you have to say upon the business of your applications to parliament, for the repeal of the Corporation and Test-Acts.

Thus, my dear Jack, you have our second afternoon's discourse. If you are tired of this tale, tell me, otherwise you may perhaps be at the expence of another letter or two, from

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR JACK,

MY good old grandmother, I remember, used to tell us children, that the way to be good Christians, was to call over in our memories when we came from church what the parson had been saying: she therefore always expected an account of the sermon on Sunday evening. Now the long sermon which our Non-Con parson has given us in our way hither, I have been diligently recollecting; and if to be a good Christian is not only to fear God, but to live in charity with our neighbour, I do assure you the recollection of his discourse has had a very beneficial effect with me in this way.

These Dissenters I have been taught to consider as a very obstinate self-willed people, governed more by humour than reason; but I am now convinced that they have a great deal to say for themselves, and
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are men of principle and conscience. I took it for granted, that they were of a dissatisfied, restless, contentious disposition, but I am now persuaded that, whatever may be the cast of some few among them, who by their imprudent and clamorous behaviour, have brought the character of the whole into question, they are, the generality of them, peaceable and friendly, loyal subjects, and good members of society. And if we may judge of the rest by the gentle and obliging manners of him who has held forth to us these two or three days past, I shall no more set them down for a morose, severe, and unyielding people. Indeed I am on tip toe to join them. What say you? But hold—we must have a turn or two more with them before we yield. You will therefore allow me to go on with my tale——

My brother Churchman, soon after entering our coach the third day, made a candid acknowledgement to the Dissenter, that what he had alledged the preceding day in favour of himself and his brethren, had in a good measure effaced the ill impressions which a too credulous regard to public report

report had made on his mind. But you will excuse me, continued he, if I still feel myself hurt by your late management in the business of the repeal of the Corporation and Test-Laws. The eagerness with which that matter was taken up, and the asperity and obstinacy with which it was pursued, I really think did you no honour. It injured your character, both for good sense and moderation, in the opinion of wise and thoughtful men.

Why, Sir, said the Dissenter, I have no doubt but on a cool dispassionate consideration of that matter, you will see reason to alter your mind, and to admit that we are not so much to blame as you have hastily imagined. Permit me to give you a general view of the history, nature, and intent of those laws; to submit to you my own opinion on the repeal of them; and then to enquire what judgment is to be passed on the measures the Dissenters took to that end.

The Corporation Act was passed about two years after the Restoration, and from the preamble to it, as well as from the history

tory of that period, it appears to have been levelled against the Protestant-Dissenters. It declares that no person shall be elected into any corporation office, who shall not, within one year before such election, have taken the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the Church of England.

The Test-Act was passed about ten years after the former, and was chiefly levelled against the Roman Catholics, though it comprehended the Protestant-Dissenters in it *. It declares that every person who
accepts

* The history of this Act is curious, and cannot be better related than in the words of Mr. Beaufoy, in his speech in the House of Commons, March 28, 1787, when he moved for the repeal of this and the Corporation-Act. " In the year 1672, the people," says he, " were alarmed with an apprehension that the sovereign (Charles the II^d) had formed the design of subverting the established religion of this country. They had long known that his confidential friends were Catholics; that the prime minister, Lord Clifford, and the king's brother, the presumptive heir to the crown, were of this persuasion; and that the king himself was suspected of having secretly embraced the same hostile faith. But superadded to these different circumstances of alarm, they now saw an army under Catholic officers, in the depth of winter, encamped
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accepts a civil office or a commission in the army or navy, and who does not within the time

“ at the gates of London. A fact so extraordinary, which
 “ admitted but of one interpretation, filled their minds with
 “ uneasiness and extreme dismay, and in the pause of the
 “ first impression, induced legislature to pass the law that
 “ bears the title of an act for preventing the dangers which
 “ may happen from Popish recusants, but which is better
 “ known by the shorter name of the Test-Act.

“ The minister, Lord Clifford, who was himself a Catho-
 “ lic, attempted to persuade the Dissenters to oppose the bill,
 “ upon the ground that its provisions were so worded as to
 “ extend to *them*, who were not in any respect the objects
 “ of the bill; and that nothing could be so unjust as to sub-
 “ ject to the *penalties* of the law, a description of men who
 “ were not within the *meaning* of the law. The Dissenters
 “ admitted the force of the argument, but waved their right
 “ to its benefit; and one of the members of the city of Lon-
 “ don, who was himself a Dissenter, declared, on their be-
 “ half, that in a time of public danger, when delay might
 “ be fatal, they would not impede the progress of a bill
 “ which was thought essential to the safety of the kingdom;
 “ but would trust to the good faith, to the justice, to the
 “ humanity of parliament, that a bill for the relief of the
 “ Dissenters should afterwards be passed. The lords and
 “ the commons admitted, without hesitation, the equity of
 “ the claim. They considered the debt they had contracted
 “ to the Dissenters, as a debt of *honour*, the payment of
 “ which could not be refused; and accordingly a bill for
 “ their relief was passed; but its success was defeated by the
 “ sudden prorogation of the parliament.

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time prescribed by the act, take the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the usage of the Church of England, shall be disabled in law, to all intents and purposes whatever, from occupying any such civil office, or from holding any such military commission; and if, without taking the sa-

“ A second bill was brought in with a view to the same
 “ object, though by a different title, in the year 1680; and
 “ passed the two houses in consequence of the same implied
 “ compact. But while it lay ready for the royal assent,
 “ King Charles the Second, who was much exasperated
 “ with the Dissenters for refusing to support the Catholics,
 “ and who always delighted to obtain the most *unwarrantable*
 “ ends by the most *despicable means*, prevailed upon the clerk
 “ of the crown to steal the bill, and over-reach the parlia-
 “ ment. The court exulted in the success of the expedient,
 “ and thought it a happy way of getting rid of a disagree-
 “ able measure. But that relief to the Dissenters, which
 “ neither the obvious equity of their claim, nor the coun-
 “ tenance given to it by parliament could extort from King
 “ Charles the Second, the magnanimity of William the
 “ Third was impatient to bestow: for, in one of his early
 “ speeches from the throne, he expressed his earnest hope
 “ that such alteration would be made in the law, as would
 “ leave room for the admission of all his Protestant subjects
 “ who were willing and able to serve him.” See Beaufoy's
 Speech on a motion for the repeal of the Corporation and
 Test-Laws, March 28, 1787, p. 16—19. Printed for Cadell,
 in the Strand, and Robinson, Paternoster-Row.

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cramental qualification within the time prescribed by the act, he does continue to occupy a civil office, or to hold a military commission, and is lawfully convicted, then he not only incurs a large pecuniary penalty, but is disabled from thenceforth, for ever, from bringing any action in course of law, from prosecuting any suit in any court of equity, from being guardian of any child, or executor or administrator of any person, as well as from receiving any legacy.

Now upon this statement of the Corporation and Test-Laws, it is natural to ask in the first place, Ought a man to be deprived of his just right (for eligibility to places of trust and profit in the state, is the just and natural right of every good subject) ought, I say, a man to be deprived of it, purely because he conforms not to the rights and ceremonies of the Church of England? We say, certainly not. His non-conformity for reasons of conscience, the sincerity of which no one has a right to question, is surely no crime. And ought a man to be punished for what is no crime? Nor is either his ability for serving his country,

country, or his integrity, in the least affected by his non-conformity.

But, say you, a man's holding principles which manifestly tend to the dissolution of the state, is a reason why he should not be admitted to an office of dignity and power, which may enable him to carry those principles into effect. True. And this is a reason why a Roman Catholic, who avows principles which are acknowledged on all hands to affect the peace and the very existence of the state, should be declared ineligible by the law to such stations. But no such reason exists in regard of Protestant-Dissenters. They are hearty friends of the Constitution and of the Royal Family, and warm assertors of civil and religious liberty, and therefore good subjects of the state.

But, say you, they are hostile to the Church. They do not indeed approve of the constitution discipline and forms of the Church of England: but it does not thence follow that they consider it as their duty at all events to attack the hierarchy. Far from it. Whoever rightly understands their prin-

principles will clearly see, that the Church of England has very little danger of that kind to apprehend from the Dissenters. For if they do not approve, as is the fact, of national establishments of religion, it follows that they have no wish that their own or any other form of religion should be substituted in the room of that which now exists. They admit that the majority have a right to adopt what mode of worship they please, and are sensible that that which obtains is generally agreeable. Is it probable then, that the Dissenters, considering how small a proportion they bear to the general body of the community should, when admitted to offices in the state, be eager to bring forward a change, against the sense of the majority, and which when it had taken place would not come up to their idea?

But, Sir, were the Church exposed to much greater danger than it really is, to contend that the just and natural rights of men are to be sacrificed to its safety, is doing an irreparable injury to its honour. This reasoning followed to its utmost length, will not fail to carry you to downright intolerance

lerance and persecution. I cannot therefore but think the Corporation-Act unjust and oppressive.

But if it be necessary, for the security of the Church, to deprive the Dissenters of their natural right, it is pity but some other method of discriminating between a Churchman and a Dissenter were devised, than that of obliging all who are admitted to places of trust and profit in the state, to take the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. For this test is not fully adequate to the purposes of its appointment. In its operation it does prodigious injury to an infinite multitude of people. And I must add that it is a manifest prostitution of that sacred rite.

It is not adequate to the ends of its appointment. For though it keeps out men of honour and conscience, and so by the way pays them a high compliment while it robs them of their just right, it proves too feeble a barrier against men of the contrary description; and such there will be among all bodies of people. These, while they call themselves Dissenters, will not

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scruple

scruple when a lucrative place offers, to go to the Parish Church and take the Sacrament. And so, after all your endeavours to keep out the Dissenters, you are sure to have those of them with you who are of a questionable character, while the truly meritorious are excluded. It is also to be remembered that there are worthy men among them, who as they have no conscientious objection to occasional conformity, so think they ought to qualify when called upon to serve a burdensome office in the state. Thus you see the test is insufficient to the ends of its appointment.

But its greatest evil lies in obliging men of all descriptions, in order to their holding lucrative places, to take the Sacrament. And does it not chill your blood, Sir, to see a professed infidel; a debauched lieutenant in the army or the navy, or an exciseman that perhaps scarce ever thought of religion in his life; to see people of such marked characters, entering the Church, approaching the altar, and demanding the bread and wine at the hand of the minister for the purpose just mentioned? And how hard is the
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the service required of the minister, who, if he declines administering the Sacrament to persons he suspects to be prophane or immoral, runs the risk of an action in our courts of law !

And indeed I should think a sober man, who has not been used to communicate monthly at his Parish Church, must feel rather uncomfortably when his conscience twits him with the thought, that nothing urged him to his duty but a mere worldly consideration. I thought, said a certain gentleman of feeling in this predicament, when I heard the clerk with a loud voice desire those who came to qualify, to draw off to the left side of the altar by themselves, that he might attest on oath the fact of their qualification ; I thought, said he, of the last judgment, and could not get the idea a long while out of my mind, of being ordered to the left hand of the Judge.

And now, Sir, is it not a great evil, to throw in the way of thousands of thoughtless people a temptation to act contrary to the convictions of their conscience ; or to be necessary to their admitting an idea infi-

nitely injurious to their most important interests, that religion is a mere engine of the state? No pains need be taken to prove that our Lord Jesus Christ did not institute this sacred rite to be a qualification for a secular employment, but that the objects he proposed were of a very different nature. This abuse therefore of the institution may be justly called a prostitution of it.

Such, in my opinion, is the true reasoning upon the question respecting the Corporation and Test-Laws. And you will now, Sir, perhaps wonder to hear me express some indifference about the repeal of them; but you will cease to do so, when I tell you that it is owing to the anxiety I feel for the probable consequences of that event, should it take place. Laws so contrary to equity and sound policy I have no doubt ought to be repealed. Nor could I, under this conviction, hesitate a moment upon the part I ought to take, had I any influence to procure the repeal of them. But the effect it will be likely to have upon the Dissenters, considered both in a religious and civil capacity, ought not to be overlooked; and

and the rather, as the seriously weighing it may have an influence to guard us against the evils to be apprehended, to check a too eager pursuit of the object, and to reconcile us to a disappointment, should that be the event.

We have been used to tell our people that prosperity, through the folly and perverseness of the human heart, is often unfriendly to religion, and therefore ought not to be too eagerly coveted; and that adversity, duly operating as a remedy for our ill humours is friendly to it, and therefore ought not to be unreasonably dreaded. This you may call puritanical language, but it is not the less just, nor is it very unlike that which our Master used when he told his disciples, that "through many tribulations they must enter into the kingdom," and that "they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution."

Not that we mean to court persecution. So we have been represented by a famous wit of your Church. But I assure you, Sir, we have not yet learned the trick of "crying to the next person we meet in the street,

Worthy Sir, do me the honour of a good slap in the chaps; and then going home and boasting of what we have undergone for the public good." Nor yet have we learned the other trick he imputes to us, " of aiming to bring our tatters into fashion in court and city, and of getting on a great horse and eating custard." The hypocrisy of the former we detest, and the great evil of the latter is what I tremble at, as the possible consequence, through the levity of the human heart, of the repeal of the Corporation-Act.

I may perhaps be more timid than some other people, but I cannot get rid of my fears that your Corporation feasts, with all their attendant circumstances of dissipation and folly, may prove a snare to the virtue and piety of a Dissenter. Should a revolution in their general character for serious religion be the unhappy effect of their admission to places of profit and honour, whatever services some of them may render the state, the evil in my opinion will scarcely be compensated thereby. It behoves them
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however seriously to consider the risk they would in that case run.

The public, I am sensible, would be greatly benefited by the ability and virtue of those who are by this law rendered incapable of serving their country in this line : a consideration which ought to have its due weight with those in whose option the repeal of it lies. But if they are not in a disposition to comply, be their reasons what they may, the Dissenters are not chargeable with any neglect of duty on their part to the public ; and should console themselves with the reflection, that the denial of their just claims, taking place by the permission of Divine Providence, may prove an occasion of infinite advantage to themselves and their posterity.

But if the prospect of honour and emolument be the sole motive with any of them to the ardent efforts used to gain this point, it is a sad symptom, I must acknowledge, of the declension of real piety among us. To see men of any description grasping at shadows is unpleasant : but how much more men whose pious ancestors treated all these

things with indifference, and, in a comparative view, with contempt; and whose greatest glory it was to renounce the world for the sake of a good conscience! and I will add men, who (amidst their eagerness to acquire these baubels) boast they account it an honour to be a Dissenter! But why so unhappy under these disabilities, unpleasing as they may be? The inconveniencies we suffer thereby are of trifling account, when compared with the fines, imprisonments, and other cruel abuses which our fathers of the last century endured. We have free liberty to worship God according to our conscience, and for that liberty, though I am as sensible as any man that it is our natural and just right, we ought to be thankful to God, and to those who have it in their power to deprive us of it.

There is, Sir, an old fashioned book called the Bible, which tells us the witnesses, by whom I understand all the sincere friends of virtue and piety, are for a certain time to prophecy, or bear their testimony to the truth, in sackcloth. That time, it is I believe on all hands acknowledged, is not yet
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run out. Sackcloth is not indeed a pleasant garment. But why in such a hurry to throw it off? I had much rather appear dressed in it when my Master comes, than arrayed in the most fashionable and expensive garment of the present times. Would to God the Dissenters now possessed that dignity of character, which reflected such immortal glory upon the countenances and names of an infinite number of witnesses that have gone before them!

But, Sir, the Dissenters are to be considered in their civil as well as religious capacity. And in this view of them they are a respectable body of people, and have weight and influence, as they ought to have in the community. The Church of England is sensible of this, and hath more than once acknowledged herself indebted to their seasonable interpositions in her favour, for deliverance from impending ruin. I refer to the very period when the Test-Act, which deprives them of their just and natural claims, was passed; and to the revolution in 1688. So that in effect they may be said to have been the saviours both of
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the Church and of their Country. They are therefore a body of people that ought to be looked up to with respect.

But when this barrier, which impolicy as well as injustice hath set up against them, is destroyed, they will mingle with the general mass of the people, and lose all their former consideration and importance in society. They are now a compact body, cemented by one common civil interest, but, that band once dissolved, their union will instantly cease. And upon their admission into the great world, they will no doubt be complimented by their opponents in much the same manner, that two champions in the lower house complimented each other upon their being called up to the higher, " My Lord, I give you joy: we are now equally insignificant." These things I think it my duty to say, because no argument should be withholden to persuade legislature to abolish laws which I believe to be unjust, to be occasions of great evil to mankind, and to be most offensive to Almighty God. But then I say them with regret, for the dread I have of the consequences
already

already stated as likely to result from the repeal of them.

The Churchman heard with patience this long discourse, and acknowledged he felt the force of the reasoning; but still, said he, I must insist that your application to parliament was conducted in a very imprudent manner, and accompanied with circumstances censurable, in a high degree. Had you come forward in the temper we have now talked over the matter, you would, in my opinion, have disarmed your opponents of the only plausible reason they had for denying your request. They did not mean by urging the continuance of these laws to criminate the Dissenters, as Dissenters, or to insist that they were not entitled to the natural rights of good subjects. The merits of the abstract question they were not disposed to debate. All they meant to say was, that when things are so circumstanced, that the continuance of a law, which bears hard upon a particular description of men, is necessary to the security of the Church and the peace of the State ;
then

then the refusing to repeal it is a duty incumbent on legislature.

Of the fallacy of this position, continued the Churchman, I am sufficiently convinced by your reasoning. But the position once admitted, the business was to fix upon you the charge of implacable enmity against the Church, and a factious disposition to disturb the peace of the state. The strong language therefore you held of not asking a favour, but insisting on your right; your associating all over the kingdom for the purpose of enforcing your demand; your refusing your votes for candidates at elections, if they did not at all events promise you their support; your angrily replying, at least some of you, in the affirmative, when asked whether you had not yet farther demands; and the wrathful temper you betrayed on the failure of your application, so acrimoniously expressed by Dr. Priestley in a pamphlet published by him on that occasion; these charges did not fail to be improved against you. And I must confess your conduct appeared to me exceedingly imprudent, though it might not merit the description some
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were disposed to give it of insult. Against these evils it behoved you to have been on your guard.

I don't mean, Sir, replied the Dissenter, to justify these measures; they were ill-advised. But still you will not so much wonder at them, when you reflect that those who urged them, fully satisfied of the justice of their cause, felt for the injury done them more sensibly than you or even many of their own brethren did; and that their resentments were aggravated by a recollection that their just rights had been withheld upwards of a century, and that their applications from time to time for redress, however mild and respectful, had not only failed of success, but been treated as the mere effect of a party and factious spirit. These things considered, it was not so much to be wondered at that warm and hasty men should be eager to change the mode of application, to summon together all their force, to go to parliament with a louder and firmer tone than formerly, to insist boldly on their right, and to resolve at all events not to recede from their claim.

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But, Sir, I am persuaded, continued the Dissenter, had they deliberated coolly on the business, they would have seen the mistake of adopting such measures. Where is the wisdom, when suing my right of one who has it in his power to withhold it, to address him after a manner that shall rouse his resentments, and give him an opportunity of changing his ground from the question of my claim, to a charge he has to exhibit against me of insult and abuse? What necessity was there for demanding the sense of all the Dissenters through the kingdom, upon a question to which all the world knew not one of them, unless an utter stranger to the Corporation and Test-Laws, could give a negative? Where was the prudence of putting forward meetings every where, which consisting of people of very different religious opinions, were scarce likely all of them to be so pleasant and harmonious, as was at such a time especially to be wished? If the gentlemen whose vicinity to parliament rendered them the fit persons to conduct the business, if these gentlemen were competent to it, what need
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of delegates from all parts, unless it had been the wish to embarrass rather than assist them? And what advantage was to be expected from calling forth our whole force to view, except that of exposing our weakness? 'Tis marvellous to me that men of sense should not have reverted to these considerations, or, if they did, that the force of them was not duly felt.

But more than this. If it must be made a point of to catechize candidates at elections, and to tell them, if they would not vote for the repeal of these laws, they should not have our support; could any other be expected than that our opponents would do their utmost to prevent any Dissenter from getting into the House? And upon balancing the account, on this part of the business, which were most likely to be the gainers, they or we?

The menacing language, I will add, of those men who said that the object of this application to parliament was of very trifling consideration in comparison of other matters they had to bring forward, was language, considered merely in its operation

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on the question of repeal, the most absurd that was ever held by men who had the least pretension to reason. But it was the language of a very few, and I am confident unauthorized by any the smallest body of people among us. As to the pamphlet you refer to of Dr. Priestley's, it should be remembered that it was written in the moment of disappointment, and was afterwards candidly acknowledged by himself to have been entirely his own production, without the privity of any one.

And now, Sir, having treated this question in a manner that will secure me from the charge of partiality to my own connexions, the Dissenters, I will boldly step forward and put a few plain questions to you, a Churchman, not doubting that the reply will be perfectly to my satisfaction. I ask then, Do you in your conscience think, that these warm measures, however imprudent and reprehensible, and which were far from being approved of by the generality of Dissenters, have merited the treatment they have met with from the advocates of your Church? Put yourself in
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our situation, denied as we certainly are, or however fully believe ourselves to be, of a just and natural claim, and say, Whether the intemperate heats of some among us in their application for redress, do furnish clear proof that the body of Dissenters are a sour, peevish set of people, contentious and seditious, of a vindictive temper, and sworn enemies to the Church, if not to the King and Constitution? The most unequivocal proofs we have given to the contrary, by our public and authentic declarations, and by our known and marked conduct on many memorable occasions. Is not therefore such a charge most unfair and unjust?

And even as to those among us whose conduct has been the most deserving of censure, I ask, Has it been such as will justify the raising a cry against them, that could scarce fail of bringing after it the destruction of their places of worship, and their property, if not of their lives? The miserable drunken mob, who committed such horrid devastation at Birmingham, were deserving of exemplary punishment. But the men, who under a pretence of zeal for the

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Church and the King, instigated them to these devastations, were deserving of much greater : for while they malevolently abused the Dissenters, they shamefully libelled the names they pretended to venerate, and in effect told the world that the Church, under whose banner they would be thought to fight, was intolerant, vindictive, and cruel.

If, replied the Churchman, the principles of the Church of England were such as I acknowledge the conduct of those men did, by manifest implication, impute to it, I would no longer consider myself a member of it, but instantly become a Dissenter.— But I see we are just got to our inn. In the afternoon I shall wish to hear what you have to say to the charge, of having taken an unjustifiable part in the French revolution.

Thus you have, my friend, our third day's morning conversation. That of the afternoon, and which will be the last, I mean to send you by the next post from hence, for our captain tells us the wind is still against us, and probably will be so for some days yet.

I am yours, &c.

L E T T E R VI.

I SEND you, my dear Jack, by this post, an account of the last round fought by our two combatants. The odds have for some time been in favour of the Dissenter, and you will find, at the close of this letter, the company have decreed him the palm. My brother Churchman, I assure you, has not yielded dishonourably on any point, and what pleases me most of all is, that the business was finished with great good humour. Having had an excellent dinner the set-to this afternoon was without any symptom of hostility. Our good lady, who had said little hitherto in the course of the debate, pleasantly observed that she had had her chirurgical instruments in readiness, her plaister and scissars, but there had been so few wounds given or received on either side, that she had put them up, persuaded that there would be no occasion for them at all.

The combatants each thanked her for her goodness and proceeded.

The charge, said the Churchman, which I told you in the morning, I had yet to exhibit against the Dissenters, would be "the part they are reported to have taken in the French Revolution; from whence it hath been concluded that they are not unfriendly to republicanism."

Before we proceed, replied the Dissenter, it will be necessary to remind you again, Sir, of what has been more than once observed in our talk, that the Dissenters always have been, and still are, hearty friends of limited monarchy, or of that form of government which obtains in this country. It is a constitution which, in its due state, affords the best security to the rights and liberties of the subject, and possesses both the principles and means which are essential to its permanence and improvement: and on these two accounts hath the advantage of all other forms of government. In this opinion I am confirmed by the little knowledge I have of ancient and modern history. And I am well persuaded it is a form of
govern-

government that, of all others, best suits the principles, genius, and temper of the British nation. Having said this, allow me to make some remarks on the French Revolution, which will prepare the way for a consideration of the particulars you have to object to the conduct of the Dissenters in reference to this business.

The state of the French nation, at the commencement of this extraordinary change in their affairs, was truly wretched. This I believe is allowed on all hands. Their revenue through extravagance and mismanagement exhausted, and on the point of bankruptcy — Their parliaments denied freedom of debate, and required to register the edicts of the sovereign, however contrary to their judgment and conscience, at the peril of banishment — The people loaded with taxes, unequally laid and oppressively levied — Justice administered partially, slowly, and in many instances arbitrarily — The freedom of the press under absolute restraint — Individuals, on a mere suspicion of being inimical to the measures of the court, suddenly seized by Letters de Cachet, and sent

into confinement, without the means or possibility of obtaining legal redress—Great irregularities among the clergy and religious orders—Liberty of conscience denied—And the Protestants, once a famous and flourishing people, whose ancestors possessed large property, of which they were most unjustly and cruelly deprived by the revocation of the edict of Nantes ; these not only shut out from all influence in the state, but absolutely prohibited worshipping God according to their conscience—These and many other evils, too numerous and complicated to be recited, did that unhappy people groan under.

And now can it be thought strange that they should wish to be emancipated from their bondage, and to enjoy freedom and happiness ? But what was their idea of freedom and happiness ? It was—security to their persons and property—liberty to do what they pleased, provided they injured not their neighbour—a right to chuse those to whom should be confided the power of making laws, and disposing of such portion of their property as was necessary for the service

service of the state—elegibility to offices of trust, profit, and honour—the freedom of the press—liberty to worship God after the manner they thought right, without controul from any quarter whatever—and the total abandonment of all idea of conquest over other nations, or of giving law to any other state than their own. These were the wishes of the sober and temperate part of the people. And what wise and good man but must acknowledge them to be founded in the soundest principles of equity and policy?

The question then was, By what means, circumstanced as the French nation was at the time we speak of, these advantages, so truly desirable, were to be acquired?—By a Reform?—Or by a total change in the Constitution? The latter was resolved on. But it has always struck me, that previous to that resolution, the following questions should have been seriously considered and accurately investigated.

In the first place, What is the present state of human nature, or the prevailing character of mankind? Government, at least

the warm disputes that have been agitated about government, manifestly suppose that man is not merely an imperfect but depraved being. Unwilling as some may be to admit this, it is a fact which history and what we continually observe around us prove beyond all reasonable doubt. Ambition, avarice, lust of power, self-will, domination, cruelty, and revenge, are the horrid sources whence all the miseries in society originate. Nor do these passions mark the characters of a few only. They are not peculiar to this, that, or the other country; they are to be met with more or less every where. Insomuch that we may affirm, without breach of charity, they domineer over the far greater part of mankind. When therefore the regeneration of a kingdom is in contemplation, it is as unphilosophical as it is unchristian to thrust this fact from our view, or to give it only a transient attention.

He that builds his house well should well consider the materials of which it is to be built, and, if he means to erect a complete and durable edifice, whether they are of a
kind

kind every way suited to his purpose, or capable of being fashioned to that idea of perfection he has framed. Supposing the greater part of the French nation to be under the prevailing influence of the passions just mentioned, ought it not to have been carefully considered, whether this depravity of character would not defeat the object? Or if not, in what degree it would obstruct the regeneration of the aggregate body—a vast kingdom consisting of four or five and twenty million of people? Had this been duly attended to, I am of opinion the question between a Reform and a total change of Constitution, would have been held a little longer in suspense. Nor would the general cause of liberty have suffered thereby.

Another question to have been asked, and very particularly considered, should no doubt have been—What is the peculiar discriminating character of the French nation? All the wise legislators of antiquity, such as Solon and Lycurgus, paid great attention to this question in framing laws for different states: and they considered its
 impor-

importance in the business of bringing about a revolution, or absolute change in the constitution as very great indeed. It ought therefore to have had its due weight here.

Voltaire has I think somewhere told us, that a Frenchman is either a monkey or a tyger. Their levity is universally acknowledged even to a proverb. And they have lately given striking proofs of their inhumanity. Now, I admit, these passions were likely enough to prove favourable to a change in the state. But was it not as probable that, in the course of their operation to effect one change, they might, under the skilful management of interested leaders, be directed to another, and so throw the whole into confusion? This has turned out to be the case. One constitution has succeeded another, and the change has not failed to be strongly marked with levity and cruelty. What the event of the whole will be time will show.

The opposition they were likely to meet with among themselves, was also deserving of serious consideration. Although the levity of the French might prove favourable, in
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their oppressed state, to a change, it was not probable that the prejudices of the greater part of them in favour of Monarchy, would be easily subdued. France had been governed by Kings time immemorial, and amidst all changes had been famous for its attachment to the Sovereign. I can remember an old Huguenot, who, notwithstanding all his family had suffered from the proscription of Lewis the Fourteenth, was used to speak with complacency and a kind of national vanity of the Grand Monarque. The Court with its numerous dependants, the Princes of the blood, the Noblesse, and the Clergy formed a powerful body; and there could be no doubt that the idea of a new constitution would, on various accounts, inflame their passions to the greatest degree. These difficulties therefore ought to have had their due weight in a question of such moment. Again,

The relative state of the country in regard to all the other nations of Europe, merited very particular attention. France is an independant state, and has most certainly a right to determine for itself what
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form of government it shall adopt. But when the total abolition of a constitution, that had existed for ages, was in contemplation, it was natural to suppose that neighbouring states might be apprehensive, that consequences would result from thence injurious to their safety ; and that upon this account, as well as of the amity that subsisted between them and the reigning Monarch, an interference on their part might be justified. Whether such reasoning was just is not the question here. But surely policy required, that so formidable an opposition as that of all the powers of Europe, an event by no means improbable, should be viewed with an attentive eye, and not treated with negligence and contempt. " Are we able to resist so mighty a force ? " That was the question. And light from many quarters was necessary to enable a people, thus circumstanced, to determine aright upon it.

But the question which most of all required a cool, dispassionate, and serious consideration, was this—Whether there was a probability of establishing a New Constitution,

tution, at a less expence than that of a million of lives? and whether the advantage proposed would justify the running such a risk?

The loss of such a number of lives, in the course of this quarrel within and without the kingdom, was no chimerical idea. It must have forced itself upon the mind of every thoughtful man. And in considering the good to be opposed to this tremendous evil, a true statement was to be made of the comparative advantages of a Reform and a new Constitution. The New Constitution we will suppose to be an immediate and perfect cure of the evils complained of; and a Reform, such an one as they had influence and energy enough to secure, to be a remedy slow in its operation, but sure of restoring a tolerable degree of health to the state. Was not such a Reform, with the saving of a million of lives, preferable to a Constitution which, however good, must be purchased at this vast expence; and which when established would probably not possess powers sufficient to secure its permanence? Till they had by
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the most nice balancing of the scale determined this question, they were surely not to be justified in bringing forward a totally New Constitution. What degree of regard they did pay to these considerations I pretend not to say. The resolution however was adopted, and the experiment, which has arrested the attention and engaged the passions of all Europe, is now in course of trial.

It is not to our present purpose, to enter into a particular detail of the several events which have succeeded each other in the course of this business; to enquire into the character, principles, and views of the men on all sides, who have had the chief concern in it; and to point out the excellencies and defects of the Constitution decreed and published by the National Assembly. The accurate developement of all these matters by some able historian, will furnish reflections philosophical, political, and moral, the most curious to inquisitive minds, and greatly interesting to society. I must not, however, quit the subject without observing, that the several probable obstacles
just

just mentioned to the establishment of a New Constitution, which ought to have been held in full view by the leaders at the eve of it, have been realized in all their importance.

—The depraved passions of human nature have operated every where in their full force. Ambition, domination, and revenge, have not failed to feed the flame which discord has kindled in France and the neighbouring nations, and to spread the conflagration through almost all Europe.

—The characteristic genius of the French hath marked every step in the progress of the Revolution, and has had no small influence on the rapid changes that have taken place. Levity, perfidy, and inhumanity have obstructed the counsels and measures of their Legislators, Ministers, and Generals, abolished the Constitution established by the first National Assembly, thrown the succeeding into confusion, and threatened with an imperious tone the existence of the present Convention. The gaiety of fetes, processions, festivities, and theatrical amusements, hath been mingled with all the
horror

horror of bloody massacres, and the sad catastrophe of a murdered Monarch.

—The strong prejudices of a considerable part of the kingdom in favour of the old government, have not failed to stimulate the emigrants of all ranks, to every possible exertion for the recovery of their expiring cause; and to give energy to the secret practices of those within the kingdom, who have no scruple to dissemble their political sentiments, by oaths and reiterated expressions of zeal for republicanism.

—The powers of Europe, exasperated to the last degree, are leaguings against them, bringing mighty armies into the field, and putting out all their strength at sea.—In a word, the sacrifices already offered on the altar of discord, are in considerable advance towards the million of lives, which we said might be reasonably supposed would fall in this quarrel.

Can we take all these things into view, and not feel for the miseries of our fellow-creatures? Can we see the Seine tinged with blood on the tenth of August, and the streets running down with it the third of Sep-

September ? Can we follow the many thousands that have been led on to carnage like sheep to the slaughter ? Can we behold some of the leaders in this wonderful Revolution, of eminent abilities and possessed of mild and generous sentiments, ungratefully abandoned by their compatriots, denounced, threatened with assassination, and forced into exile ? In fine, can we see a Prince who with all his faults was chargeable with neither obstinacy nor inhumanity ; a Prince, whose justification from every previous crime, was announced to all the world by their choice of him for their King ; a Prince, whom on that occasion they declared to be inviolable, and that what guilt it remained possible for him to contract, should be no otherwise punished than by dethronement ; a Prince, who at the moment of his dethronement was cast into a prison, where he became utterly incapable, had he been so disposed, of injuring the state ; a Prince, thus circumstanced, sentenced to death by men who challenged in their own persons the triple character of Accuser, Jury, and Judge ; can we, I say, see such a sacrifice

immolated in the midst of one of the greatest cities in the world, and amidst the acclamations of a people who had often cried Viv' le Roi, without feeling indignation and exclaiming aloud—To what lengths will mens' passions hurry them? Where will all these miseries end? 'Tis the voice of God: he thunders and the nations tremble.

—————' rubente
 ' Dexterâ sacras jaculatus arces,
 ' Terruit urbem:
 ' Terruit gentes, grave ne rediret
 ' Sæculum Pyrrhœ'—————

At the commencement of this memorable struggle for liberty I rejoiced—rejoiced in the hope that we should quickly see a wretched people emancipated from their bondage, and put in possession of their just rights—I rejoiced in the prospect of happiness being more universally and equally enjoyed — I rejoiced, above all, at the thought, that the captivity in which the Roman hierarchy had held the consciences of men, was now about to be led captive, and

and the light of truth, both natural and divine, was just dawning on this wretched kingdom, and would quickly dispel the horrid mists of ignorance and vice, which had for ages darkened and polluted it.

It was my wish that the Constitution of this country might, in its most perfect state, rise into existence in that ; and it was my hope that, in the progress of their affairs, such would be the event. When Monarchy and Democracy were blended, I flattered myself with the notion that in a course of time, feeling the necessity of an intermediate order of men to preserve the balance between those two powers, and to give energy to government, they would restore under proper restrictions an Aristocracy, and so subdue the resentments and secure the allegiance of men of large property and distinguished merit. The new American Republic, for which they professed so high a regard, has seen the necessity of such a change in their Constitution ; and in that, which now consists of President, Senate, and House of Representatives, the French had a model before them, which

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would probably catch their attention and engage their imitation.

These were ideas which suggested themselves to a mind, that heartily wished well to the cause of liberty and of just subordination in society. And so long as these prospects were in the least degree probable, though perhaps you, Sir, would have deemed them chimerical, they were consoling to one who looked forward with horror to all the confusions and miseries of civil discord. But alas ! they are now totally overcast and dissipated. The Jacobins, those sworn enemies of every form of government but that of an imperious and tyrannical Democracy, have silenced every feeling of humanity, hung out the bloody flag of massacre, summoned all the powers of intrigue, cruelty, and death, to their standard, and devoted with unrelenting malice to destruction the very men whom the other day they applauded as the saviours of their country. Such conspiracies, such outrages have gone directly, as Cicero says of certain dissensions in the Roman state, *non ad commutandam, sed ad delendam Rempublicam.*

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What then in this state of things is to be wished for?—That the sword of Confederate Princes should bathe itself in the blood of innocent thousands, and with this tremendous sacrifice avenge the injustice done by these miscreants to their King and Country?—Or, that the counsels of Marat and the arms of Dumourier should lay waste the neighbouring provinces, and then plunge this kingdom into the same wretched state of anarchy and ruin their own is now in? The latter calamity every sober man must surely deprecate. And if the former takes place, while we approve the sufferings of the guilty, and rejoice that peace is again restored to Europe; we shall see reason, considering the vicissitude of human affairs, to rejoice with trembling.

Should that spirit of domination, which has ever marked the Court of Rome, and received its principal support from thence, which has shown itself in various forms even in many Protestant States, and to which the principles of the Revolution in 1688 were opposed; should that spirit, I say, again prevail through Europe, a

thoughtful man, who has in recollection the history of past times, who is sensible that human nature is now much the same it was formerly, and who attentively reads his Bible, will not be greatly surprized or unduly dismayed. It is good to be prepared for all events.

Tyranny over men's persons and property hath usually originated in unjust claims on conscience. And to compass the former, some pretence hath ever been found to justify the latter. The sources of knowledge have been obstructed, and pains been taken to persuade men that their interest was consulted in not allowing them to think and judge for themselves. Such has been the rise and progress of despotism among mankind. The late improvements therefore in philosophy are to be greatly valued, not only on their own account, but on that of their happy effect to promote free enquiry, and so to beget love of liberty; objects these of great importance in the apprehension of every intelligent and sensible man, and of every truly liberal and generous mind.

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But it is possible that speculative men may have boasted too much of their improvements in knowledge, and the friends of liberty may have placed too great confidence in the liberal spirit of the times. There are yet those who have not given up the monopoly of science, nor consented that the trade of free enquiry should be thrown open. And there are those who still confound, and chuse to do so, the terms of liberty and licentiousness. Lust of power is not yet extinguished in the bosoms of Monarchs, Aristocrats, or Democrats: neither is despotism, under either of these standards, yet driven out of the world. The lion hath not yet learned to lie down with the lamb, nor the leopard with the kid. Good men have ever been and still are in the minority, and Providence has yet great purposes to accomplish, ere they rise into that state of respectability in which they shall by and by be placed. God means yet to confound the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nought the understanding of the prudent, that no flesh should glory in his presence.

Should philosophers then be disappointed, and the old spirit of domination again prevail, it ought not to be thought strange. Nor let good men in this case be unduly cast down. It will be a consoling reflection to their minds in the day of trial, that they have so demeaned themselves in society, as not by any imprudent, unseasonable, or unjustifiable effort to have irritated and inflamed an intolerant spirit, and so to have been accessory to its painful consequences. And it will be a comfort to them to believe that Providence, in the course of all human affairs, hath its eye steadily fixed on the closing scene, when the witnesses, the true friends of virtue and piety, though slain, shall rise again, and enjoy the fruits of justice, friendship, and piety in their noblest perfection. Let their eye also be fixed on that day, and so let them assume a courage becoming their characters, as champions in the cause of liberty, virtue, and religion. Let dignity mark their countenances, and serenity possess their breasts. Let them never shrink back from a profession of the truth, nor be ashamed of bearing their testimony

timony to it, though it be in sackcloth. Let them defend both their own innocence, and the noble cause wherein they are engaged, with Reason and the Word of God; rejecting all other weapons or modes of defence, as not only ineffectual, but tending to animosity and confusion. The good man neither asks nor needs the aid of malevolent invective or clamorous abuse:

‘ Non eget Mauri jaculis neque arcu,

‘ Nec venenatis gravidâ sagittis,

———pharetrâ.’

With joy let us all, who fear God, look forward, amidst our various speculations, to the glorious day before us, and not be unreasonably anxious about any intervening events, however unpleasant and contrary to our wishes.

To observe the influence of divine Providence in all the occurrences of life, especially those of the magnitude we have been speaking of, is the delight as well as duty of Christians: and, persuaded that such events are in perfect unison with the predictions of the Bible, they feel themselves dis-

disposed to place firm confidence in the great Governor of the world, and to address their ardent prayers to him "that his kingdom may come, and his will be done in earth as it is in heaven." And it is the duty of men, in their collective as well as individual capacity, to regard and review the providence of God. The Greeks, Romans, and other Pagan nations carried their devotion even to superstition. Such excess must have been offensive to Heaven; but surely it was much less so than a total disregard if not absolute disavowal of the superintending influence of the Deity in human affairs.

The guilt of this kind which the French nation have contracted, amidst the tremendous convulsions of their Empire, every thoughtful and pious man must have marked with concern and detestation. We have scarce heard from the beginning to the present time an appeal once made to God; his name mentioned in any of their documents, instructions, or decrees; or a prayer addressed to him for the guidance of their counsels or the success of their arms. The

urgency of their affairs might require their assembling for the business of the state; on the day they had been accustomed to pay some regard to the Deity; but the gay amusements of the evening, instead of receiving a check at a time when reason and religion demanded the most serious reflection, have been encouraged and promoted. And even the notice of the Christian era seems to be expunged from their calendar. These circumstances, though of little account with some, have not failed to make unfavourable impressions on the minds of the sober and thoughtful part of mankind.

But it is time to pause. These general observations on the French Revolution have, I fear, been carried to too great a length. The business, however, before us will I hope be shortened by this trespass on the patience of the company. Whatever objections you may have, Sir, continued the Dissenter, to our conduct on this extraordinary occasion, may, I think, now be easily obviated.

Why, Sir, replied the Churchman, I have nothing to object to the Dissenters, but
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what public report hath brought to my ears; and that I must acknowledge hath made an unfavourable impression on my mind, with respect to their temper and views. It has been said abroad, "that they of all people expressed the greatest joy at the first news of the French Revolution; that they have assembled in one place and another, on the annual day of festivity, to commemorate that event; that they have sent letters of congratulation to the National Assembly and other Societies in France, from whom they have received in return fraternal acknowledgments of affection, gratitude, and esteem; that they have not only assured them of their good wishes, but offered them all the assistance in their power, towards carrying on their design; and that Paine's book, so manifestly intended to excite sedition, they read with avidity, and circulated with no small attention and eagerness."

Before I reply to these charges, answered the Dissenter, you must allow me, Sir, to remind you of what I have more than once observed in the course of this debate, that
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the faults of individuals, be they what they may, ought not in justice to be imputed to the body to which they belong, or to be considered as affording a criterion of its general character and complexion. If indeed the letters of congratulation which you speak of, had been sent from the general body of Dissenters, or from any society consisting merely of Dissenters, there would be some force in this reasoning. But that is not the fact. Whatever, therefore, we have further to say on this subject, whether in a way of justification, excuse, or blame, is to be considered as applicable to individuals only.

This said, I beg your attention a moment to the following observations.—Every man has a right to inform himself of what is passing in the world, to speculate on public events, and reason with his neighbour about them. This I suppose none will deny. People may indeed spend more time than they ought in political enquiries, and pronounce too hastily on matters of which they can have only an imperfect knowledge. But though such conduct may be imprudent,

dent, it is not absolutely criminal, unless by their speculations they hurt their own affairs, or suffer themselves to be precipitated into undue heats, and thereby disturb the peace of society, and obstruct the prosperity of the state.

Nor is it to be wondered at, when great events take place in the world, that a thoughtful man should feel pleasure or pain, according to his apprehension of their nature and importance, and the consequences they may be likely to draw after them. His benevolent concern for the welfare of mankind will not suffer him to be a mere spectator of such occurrences: they cannot fail of interesting his passions. What good man, when he first heard of the emancipation of the French nation from a disgraceful and cruel bondage, in which they had been held for many ages, but must feel joy? Was his joy criminal? Did he do wrong in expressing it to his neighbour? Or if he and a few friends thought fit to meet together for this purpose, without any the most distant views of creating or propagating an unfavourable idea of the British Constitution, or disturbing

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ing the peace of society, where was the evil of such a meeting?

I admit that when in the progress of the French affairs, their new Constitution began to be talked of by some, as a fit model for all the other nations of Europe to copy after, it was high time for the friends of their country to be upon their guard against every thing in their conduct, that might be construed by ill-disposed persons into a tendency to promote disaffection to Government and sedition in Society. I therefore highly disapprove of the letters of congratulation sent abroad, which you refer to: they were in my opinion, to say the best of them, very indiscreet, as they contributed not a little to inflame the passions of those, who were apprehensive that some ill-designs were framing against this Country. And if there were any offers made of support to the Jacobins or other French Societies, every sober man must without hesitation condemn them.

The freedom of the press in every country ought to be held sacred; and no man who reasons soberly on questions either of phi-

philosophy, jurisprudence, or divinity, is deserving of censure. But he who shall in any country declare himself hostile to the established Constitution of it, treat the characters of the distinguished supporters and defenders of it contumeliously, and avow his intention by circulating opposite theories of his own, to subvert it; can never surely expect to be treated in any other light, than as an offender against the state. What degree of this guilt falls to the lot of the much talked of Paine, no one who has attentively read his books can be at a loss to say. There are no doubt many truths contained in them; but the spirit that prevails through them, the reflections cast on the memory of King William, and on his present Majesty, with many other matters that might be mentioned, bring him clearly within that statute of sound sense, as well as of the Bible, "Thou shalt not revile the Gods (or the Rulers) of thy people." And if such be the character of the books, and the avowed intention of their author, they who circulated them, knowing their contents, and wishing to promote his views,

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are justly chargeable with being guilty of seditious practices. "Whoever," says Mr. Locke, "either ruler, or subject, by force goes about to invade the rights of either prince or people, and lays the foundation for overturning the constitution and frame of any just government, is highly guilty of the greatest crime, I think, a man is capable of, being to answer for all those mischiefs of blood, rapine, and desolation, which the breaking to pieces of governments bring on a country. And he, who does it, is justly to be esteemed the common enemy and pest of mankind; and is to be treated accordingly."

The conduct which I before pointed out as indiscreet, and therefore reprehensible, is, I acknowledge, to be imputed to some among the Dissenters. And a few of them may possibly have imbibed republican principles, and so given occasion of suspicion, that they are not friendly to the Constitution: but I hope none of them come within the charge of those seditious practices, which we have denounced as most unquestionably criminal. Of this I am sure, that

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such characters, if such there are, are held in detestation by the general body of Dissenters.

Indeed there is a strong presumption in favour of the Dissenters, that the reports invidiously circulated concerning them as a body, *cannot* be true: a presumption arising both from their *political* state and their *religious* character.

The situation in which their dissent from the Church of England places them, is such as would render it highly imprudent in them, by an irritable and factious conduct, to bring their character for peaceableness and moderation into question with the state. Although they are in a state of legal security, yet that security they are considered as enjoying under the idea of an act of Toleration. And would the minority, in any country, so egregiously trifle with their own happiness, as wantonly to provoke those who have the power in their hands to deprive them of their liberties; having at the same time no other excuse to make for the provocation given, than that their liberties being

being their natural right they are obliged to no man for them?

Their *religious* character likewise confirms the presumption, that the cry raised against them is not founded in truth. The Dissenters do no doubt differ among themselves upon many theological questions. And it is to be feared too many of them enter not into the spirit of the religion they profess: but it is otherwise I trust with the far greater part of them. And these, urged by infinitely nobler motives than merely those of a regard to their temporal security and happiness, consider it as their indispensable duty, not to say how congenial it is to their religious feelings, to copy after the example of their divine Master; every action of whose life was marked with the fair characters of meekness, peaceableness, self-denial, forgiveness, indifference to the world, and a generous concern for the welfare of mankind. With this bright pattern before their eyes, together with those of the primitive Christians, and of their own pious ancestors, who patiently endured seeing him who is invisible, and had respect to the recom-

pence of reward ; with these examples, I say, before their eyes, it is hardly to be imagined that they can be that restless, contentious, seditious kind of people, which too many have hastily and unjustly supposed them to be.

But the matter is not left on the ground of mere presumptive evidence. For their justification from these charges they appeal to their general conduct, and to their public acts. Go into their religious assemblies, Sir, where they are accustomed to make supplications, prayers, and intercessions for the King, and all that are in authority ; and be a witness of the devotion with which they perform this part of their duty, acknowledging their obligation to lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty ; a conduct which they are persuaded is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.—In their addresses on various occasions, to his Majesty, they have not failed to express their duty, affection, and loyalty, after a manner becoming good subjects—And they have lately declared in the most explicit manner to all the world, that
 “ they

“ they venerate the Constitution of their Country, are firmly attached to the present Royal Family, revere the laws, and hold all factious and seditious practices in the greatest detestation.”

Having said this, you will allow me, Sir, to add, that they are ready on all occasions, with the like sincerity and firmness to assert, that they steadily adhere to the principles of the Revolution in 1688, as founded in the truest reason, and no way repugnant to the word of God. In these principles they have been instructed by their pious ancestors. In these they glory. And for these they contend with the greater earnestness, as they cannot forget that the intolerant and slavish principles opposed to them, have more than once endangered the Constitution, had like to have prevented the accession of the present Royal Family to the throne, and by two rebellions shook the foundations of it.

And now lay your hand upon your heart, Sir, and say, Whether you think the principles of the Dissenters are such as give the least countenance to the reports which have

been industriously spread concerning them, as a people whose very existence is dangerous to society? And whether you really think, that the imprudent, and if you will criminal, conduct of some among them is such as can with justice fix a dishonourable and suspicious imputation on the whole? You will I am sure reply in the negative.

I am a friend of all mankind, a hearty lover of my country, and feel myself most affectionately concerned for the reputation, security, and happiness of the Dissenters, of which body I have the honour to be one. Were they, numerous as they are, all present, you should, Sir, for once hear a sermon from the lips of a Non-conformist, to which I persuade myself they would pay a serious and chearful attention, and which you would approve. It should be a short one, not of the length theirs are usually said to be. It should be this :

“ —Read your Bible. Fear God, honour the King. Be subject to the higher powers, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake : to the King as supreme, and unto Governors, as unto them that
“ are

" are sent by him for the punishment of
 " evil doers, and for the praise of them
 " that do well. For so it is the will of
 " God, that with well-doing ye may put
 " to silence the ignorance of foolish men.
 " As free and not using your liberty as a
 " cloak of maliciousness, but as the ser-
 " vants of God. Render to all their due,
 " tribute to whom tribute is due, custom
 " to whom custom, fear to whom fear,
 " honour to whom honour. If it be possi-
 " ble, as much as lieth in you, live peace-
 " ably with all men. Study to be quiet,
 " and to do your own business. Set your
 " affections on things above, and not on
 " things on the earth. Strive to enter in
 " at the strait gate. Work out your own
 " salvation with fear and trembling. Let
 " your moderation be known unto all men.
 " The Lord is at hand. Yes, he cometh,
 " he cometh quickly; to call all men to
 " account for the deeds done in the body.
 " And be assured the question then will be,
 " not whether you were an Aristocrat or a
 " Democrat, whether you were for this
 " or that form of government, or were of
 " this

“ this or that political party ; but whether
 “ you have been a faithful servant of God,
 “ a meek disciple of Christ, a well-wisher
 “ to all men, and a friend to your own im-
 “ mortal soul ?” Such should be my Ser-
 mon. And I repeat it again, the generality
 if not all of them, would I am persuaded
 cordially say, Amen.

The Churchman replied, I am satisfied,
 Sir, with your account of the Dissenters,
 and am fully convinced that their princi-
 ples are founded in reason, and are in per-
 fect unison with the doctrines and precepts
 of Christianity. You yield then, said the
 rest of the company, the palm. I do, said
 he, with great chearfulness. And whatever
 may have been my former prejudices
 against the Dissenters, I assure you, Sir,
 whenever in future I shall fall in company
 with any one of that persuasion, I shall
 presume, till I have full evidence to the
 contrary, that he is a sensible, peaceable,
 and pious man. The rest of the company
 with great good nature joined in this con-
 clusion. And so our discourse on Dissent-
 ing-Politics closed.

Thus

Thus you have, my friend, the issue of this business, and I am persuaded that with the reasoning thus stated to you, though a Churchman, you will not protest against the award given. If these long letters, on a subject perfectly new to you, have afforded you any amusement and instruction, I shall be happy; and you are at liberty to make what use of them you please.

I am yours, &c.

T H E E N D.

